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COVER: (left) Affirmations improve spiritual and material life; (above) Hindu American Foundation representatives brief Florida Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (center) on issues (left to right, Nikhil Joshi, Adeeti Joshi, Suhag Shukla, Pawan Deshpande)

APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2009 • HINDU YEAR 5111  
VIRODHIN, THE YEAR OF ADVERSITIES

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Letters to the editor, subscription and editorial inquiries may be sent to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA, [letters@hindu.org](mailto:letters@hindu.org). HINDUISM TODAY (ISSN# 0896-0801; USPS# 023082), April/May/June, 2009, Volume 31, No. 2. Editorial: 1-808-822-7032; subscriptions, copy or bulk orders: (from USA or Canada:) 1-800-850-1008 or (from all countries) 1-808-240-3108, [subscribe@hindu.org](mailto:subscribe@hindu.org); advertising: 1-888-464-1008, [ads@hindu.org](mailto:ads@hindu.org). All-department fax: 1-808-822-4351. HINDUISM TODAY is published four times a year in January, April, July and October by Himalayan Academy, a nonprofit educational institution at 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Founder; Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Publisher; Paramacharya Palaniswami, Editor-in-Chief. USA subscriptions: US\$35/1 year, \$65/2 years, \$95/3 years, \$155/5 years, \$1,001/lifetime. Contact us for international rates. In Malaysia: Sanathana Dharma Publications, 45 Jalan Ungu U 9/34C, Sunway Kayangan, 40150, Shah Alam. Tel: 016-380-239; E-mail: [silvarajos@yahoo.com](mailto:silvarajos@yahoo.com). In Singapore: Sanathana Dharma Publications, Blk 210 #06-326, Pasir Ris Street 21, 510210. Tel: 9664-9001. For permission to republish a HINDUISM TODAY article, e-mail [letters@hindu.org](mailto:letters@hindu.org) or fax 1-808-822-4351. Printed in USA. Periodicals postage paid at Kapaa, Hawaii, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304.

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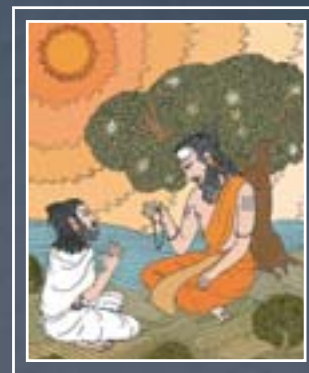
## 1 Reverence for Our Revealed Scriptures

Hindus believe in the divinity of the *Vedas*, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the *Agamas* as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end.



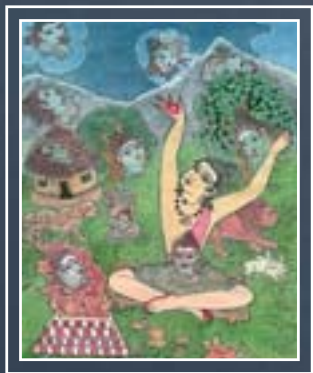
## 4 The Laws of Karma and Dharma

Hindus believe in karma—the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds—and in dharma, righteous living.



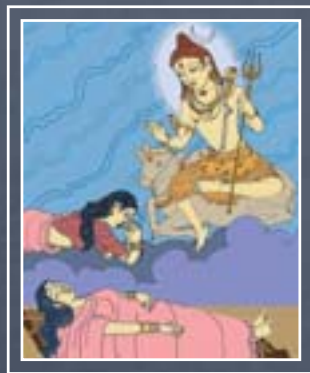
## 7 Yoga Guided by a Satguru

Hindus believe that a spiritually awakened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.



## 2 All-Pervasive Divinity

Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.



## 5 Reincarnation and Liberation

Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha—spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth—is attained. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.



## 8 Compassion and Noninjury

Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, "noninjury."



## 3 Three Worlds and Cycles of Creation

Hindus believe there are three worlds of existence—physical, astral and causal—and that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.



## 6 Temples and the Inner Worlds

Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.



## 9 Genuine Respect for Other Faiths

Hindus believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

# 9 Basic Hindu Beliefs

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, HINDUISM TODAY's founder, assembled these beliefs, a creed shared by most Hindus, to summarize a vast and profound faith. He wrote, "The Hindu is completely filled with his religion all of the time. It is a religion of love. The common bonds uniting all Hindus into a singular spiritual body are the laws of karma and dharma, the belief in reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity, the ageless traditions and our Gods. Our religion is a religion of closeness, one to another, because of the common bond of loving the same Gods. All Hindu people are a one family, for we cannot separate one God too far from another. Each in His heavenly realm is also of a one family, a divine hierarchy which governs and has governed the Hindu religion from time immemorial, and will govern Sanatana Dharma on into the infinite. The enduring sense of an ever-present Truth that is God within man is the essence of the Sanatana Dharma. Such an inherent reality wells up lifetime after lifetime after lifetime, unfolding the innate perfection of the soul as man comes more fully into the awakened state of seeing his total and complete oneness with God."



# Welcome

## TO HINDUISM TODAY'S DIGITAL EDITION!

I am pleased to welcome you to the free digital edition of Hinduism Today magazine. It is the fulfillment of a vision held by my Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, to bring the magazine's profound Hindu teachings to the widest possible audience. The text of each issue has long been available on the Web, right back to 1979, but without the photographs and art. Now you have here the entire contents of the printed edition, with all photos and art. Plus, it is interactive—every link is live; click and you go to a web page. You can participate in the magazine in a number of ways, accessed through buttons on the right. And you can help support this free edition in two ways: make an online contribution (even a small one); patronize our specialized advertisers. Explore the resources here, enjoy our latest edition and e-mail us if you are inspired.

*Bodhinatha Svarupa*

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# GLOBAL DHARMA

NEPAL

## Nepal's Furor Over Priests Is Resolved

IN DECEMBER 2008, NEPAL'S new Maoist government raised a firestorm of Hindu agitation when the Pashupatinath Area Development Trust appointed two Nepali priests to take over the famous Pashupatinath Temple, breaking a 300-year-old tradition. Since 1747, the kings of Nepal have engaged Saiva Brahmin priests from Koteswaram on Karnataka's western coast, in South India. This was due to the custom that the Nepalese are not supposed to work on certain special days, as during the mourning of a king's death, and Indians would keep the temple going. After the recent

dethronement of the king, the secular communists had few qualms about dispensing with Indian priests' services. But the Supreme Court ordered a hold on the new appointments after a petition claimed that the Trust had over-ridden proper formalities. The Nepali Congress, the second largest party in the country, accused the Maoists of hurting "the religious sentiments" of the nation's Hindus. On January 1, the Rajbhandaris, who are helpers to the main priests, locked the gate of the main shrine to stop the two Nepali priests from taking over. For the first time in the history of Nepal's revered Pashupatinath Temple, devotees were unable to offer worship to the centuries-old Deity. Many considered this a bad omen. On January 2, defying the Supreme Court order, more than a hundred Young Communist



At Pashupatinath Temple, women celebrate Teej by fasting and praying to Lord Siva for their husbands' long life and prosperity

League Maoists broke the lock of Pashupatinath's main shrine and took their own newly appointed Nepali priest, Bishnu Prasad Dahal, inside to capture the head-priest's seat. Police confronted Hindus protesting at the scene. Ten people were injured. Nepal's Foreign Minister Upendra Yadav, told CNN-IBN from Kathmandu: "The Prime Minister is responsible. This is against Hinduism and against Hindu sentiment." Condemnation mounted at home and in India, with the Maoists being accused

of violating the constitution by interfering in religion. Bending under the pressure, on January 7 Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal scrapped the appointment of the Nepali priests. Addressing Parliament, he said, "Being the Prime Minister and patron of the Pashupati Area Development Trust, I nullify the decision to appoint Nepali priests, effective from today. I ask that the previous Mul Bhatta continue to perform traditional duties beginning today."



Over 25,000 Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and Londoners filled Trafalgar Square for five hours to celebrate Hinduism's Festival of Lights

UNITED KINGDOM

## Diwali Joy Lights London

THE SEVENTH "DIWALI ON THE Square" was hosted at Trafalgar Square, London, on October 19, 2008. The program comprised dance, music and lamp lighting starting at 3pm and ending at 8pm with aarti. London's Mayor Boris Johnson said

on the [www.diwaliinlondon.com](http://www.diwaliinlondon.com) website: "Diwali is an occasion of great significance to Hindus, Sikhs and Jains, but with its underlying themes of peace, renewal and cooperation, it has relevance and meaning for all Londoners." A marvelous collaboration between the Greater London Authority, generous businesses and religious organizations, Diwali in London successfully brings India's social, spiritual culture to UK's streets.



Tribals return to Hinduism through a re-conversion of 5,200 in a ceremony led by a Vaishnava swami

INDIA

## Tribals Come Home to Hinduism

AN OCTOBER 2008, PRESS conference held in Nashik, Maharashtra, Jagatguru Ramanandacharya Narendracharya, reputed to have 10 million devotees, informed the media that he had brought over 50,000 Hindus from Christianity back to Hinduism. His most recent program brought home

over 5,200, most from Maharashtra's tribal areas. Swami says they have been alienated by mainstream Hindus. In his reconsecration ceremony he gives them the sacred thread, a Hindu identity locket and promises protection from Christian missionary pressure. He wants to see temple attendance by tribals along with integrated social dining and intermarriage with established Hindus. Swami is determined to bring 20 million back to Hinduism by 2010.



INDIA

## Tomorrow's Temple Managers

MOST TEMPLES ACROSS the world are groping in the dark for professional management resources. Festivals need crowd management. Ancient temple architecture is crying for preservation. The specter of terrorism calls for greater security. Trained temple managers can take care of all these needs and more. Shri Somnath Sanskrit University in Veraval, Gujarat, is offering a diploma course in temple management titled *Mandir Vyavasthapan*. Among the subjects taught are: temple architecture, iconography, event crowd management, rituals and festival organization in Vaishnava, Saiva and Shakta temples, Sanskrit, English, law, donations, finance management, correspondence and use of computers. The course also educates students in the history and status of most prominent



A new generation of temple managers is being trained at high, professional standards. They can also double as priests.

temples across the world. The curriculum emphasizes Sanskrit mantra recitation to invoke the Gods and the performance of *yajnas* according to scriptural injunctions. Value-based classes held in the lap of nature and spiritual awareness characterize the initiative. Training is also given in yoga, pranayama and meditation. Nuances include prasad distribution, rendition of bhajans, interaction with the media, organizing spiritual discourses and pilgrimage tours for devotees, maintaining cleanliness and upkeep of the premises. Usually the directors of a trust look after temple affairs, but

during crucial times there is often chaos due to the obvious lack of trained managers. The Mandir Vyavasthapan course blends managerial skills with a high level of professionalism. Experts are invited to teach as visiting faculty. Pupils tour prominent temples and study their management and functioning. Each student must file a project paper on any temple that he has visited during the course—outlining ways to improve the temple's affairs. The student has to give a PowerPoint presentation of the project and then go through assessment. Vice chancellor of Shri

Somnath Sanskrit University Pankaj Jani reports, "There has been an overwhelming response to the course." The university admitted its first students in August, 2008. There are now 500 students awaiting results of their first exams. The university charges a nominal Rs 350 for the course, which includes all the basic facilities for students in residence. Shree Swaminarayan Gurukul Vishwavidyalaya (SGVP) (Chharodi, Gandhinagar), Bhagvat Vidyapith (Dwarka, Somnath, Dakor and Sidhpur) and HK College (Ahmedabad) also offer the training program. Rampriyaji, the principal of Darshanam Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, administered by SGVP, says the training will help bring order into the daily affairs of ashrams. He points out that devotion coupled with managerial ability will not only help in administration, but also attract more devotees. He says that the university has been arranging placements by highlighting the fact that their graduates can not only manage a temple, but serve as priests as well.

BY TIRTHO BANERJEE

USA

## Hindus Lead Midwest Pluralism

THE HINDU EDUCATION FOUNDATION (HEF), Columbus chapter, conducted "Guru Vandana 2008" at Indian Springs Elementary School, Powell, Ohio on October 25, 2009, an event attended by over 40 teachers from various school districts, and around 250 community members—leaders, academics, children and their parents. Children of Indian origin honored their American school teachers, following the tenets of Hindu tradition. The students invited their teachers to the stage and felicitated them with a memento and a rose offering and expressed their love and respect by singing

the traditional *Guru Stotram* hymn.

Speakers emphasized the importance of the guru (teacher) in the students' development. Children from the Indian community gave a traditional dance and music presentation. Mr. Madhav Naidu, National President of HEF, closed the event, thanking teachers and the local community for their participation. He stressed the need for mutual collaboration between the community and the educators to foster a deeper appreciation of different cultures. The program was followed by an Exhibition of 5,000 years of Indian culture. HEF is an educational project that aims to educate



HEF's Guru Vandana programs are making strides in integrating Hindus and core Hindu values of tolerance and respect into US mainstream culture

multicultural American society about Hindus, Hindu values, Hinduism and its nation of origin, India. In a world plagued by religious misunderstanding, intolerance, hate and violence, HEF believes that right understanding of any faith, including

Hinduism, will lead to greater peace and harmony as well as preservation and nurturing of religious diversity, a vital necessity for the continued well being of any nation.

FOR INFO SEE:  
[WWW.HINDUEducation.ORG](http://WWW.HINDUEducation.ORG)





USA

## President Obama's Hanuman

THE INTERNET WAS RIFE with speculation about the US President's Hindu affiliations after a December *Time Magazine* article that covered tokens presumed given to him on the campaign trail that he kept in his pocket. Among them was a small metal Hanuman.



Mr. Obama's pocket good luck charms include a US soldier's bracelet, a gambler's "lucky chit," a "Madonna and Child," various coins and a "monkey God."

The truth is, no one yet knows how he acquired the token, what it means to him, or even if he knows the significance of Lord Hanuman. The fact that it has four arms shows it is likely of Southeast Asian origin. Perhaps he got it as a boy while living in Indonesia. He does mention

walking around a giant statue of Hanuman in his autobiographical book *Dreams from My Father*. In any case, Hindus are delighted that Lord Hanuman, God of sacrifice, devotion and awesome strength, is, even in a small way, part of the US President's life. Even more significantly, they were proud to be included in the medley of faiths mentioned in his inaugural speech: "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers."



Youth worship at a special shrine for Pancha Ganapati in the Arulmigu Sithivinayagar Thirukkovil in Johor Bahru, Malaysia

INTERNATIONAL

## Ganesha Festival Goes Global

HINDUS IN SOME COUNTRIES feel culturally challenged when the Christmas holidays arrive each year. Their children are immersed in an intense atmosphere of celebration, anticipation over gift giving, Santa Clause, etc., but they cannot participate. To solve the problem Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, in 1985, instituted "Pancha Ganapati," a modern five-day Hindu home festival dedicated to Lord Ganesha, beginning on December 21 and ending on the 25th. After all,

Christmas started as a makeover of ancient winter solstice celebrations, and the Tamil Ganesha festival of Markali Pillaiyar falls during this time; so shouldn't Hindus have their own gift-giving celebration, too?

Though its observance has been limited mostly to families in the US over the past decade, awareness is spreading. This year Pancha Ganapati was celebrated in India, Malaysia, Germany and Australia. Jai Ganesha!

LEARN ABOUT IT ON THE WEB:  
[WWW.GURUDEVA.ORG/GANAPATI/](http://WWW.GURUDEVA.ORG/GANAPATI/)

### THE TELANGANA ARCHAKA

Samakhya (a priests' association) has urged the Supreme Court of India to declare the hereditary priest system an integral part of religious activities under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution. According to the petitioner, M.V. Soundara Rajan, president of the Samakhya, the highest court "dealt a death blow to customs, service and sampradayams of temples" when it ruled that hereditary *archakatvam* is not an essential and integral part of religion.

### WHEN THE MAJORITY OF US

respondents in a 2007 religion poll conducted by the Pew Research Center said that other religions can lead to eternal life, evangelicals complained that people must not have understood the question. So in August, 2008, Pew conducted the poll again. This time, 65 percent of respondents said, again, that

following other religions can lead to eternal life. This time, to make sure there was no possible confusion, Pew asked questionees to specify which religions. The respondents essentially said all of them, including Hinduism and Islam. Nearly as many Christians said one can achieve eternal life by just being a good person as said that one must believe in Jesus.

### THE TELECOM REGULATORY

Authority of India (TRAI), in December, 2008, submitted recommendations to the government upholding the current prohibition against religious institutions owning broadcasting and distribution services. TRAI recommended that religious shows on regular channels be permitted but monitored. Existing concessions of channels to religious institutions, given under exceptions to the law, would be banned in four years.



HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects

and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



**Founder:** Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami  
**Publisher:** Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami  
**Editor-in-Chief:** Paramacharya Palaniswami  
**Publisher's Aide:** Paramacharya Ceyonswami  
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**Copy Editor:** Chamundi Sabanathan. **HPI Staff:** Janaka Param, Toshadeva Guhan, Easan Katir, Adi Alahan, Chandra Sankara, Shama Vinayaga. **Sanskritist:** Dr. P. Jayaraman, New York. **Artists:** A. Manivelu, S. Rajam. **Cartoonists:** Tom Thaves. **Photo Contributors:** Thomas L. Kelly, Dinodia, Dev Raj Agarwal, Gilles Flament, Vel Kadressen, Mu Devarayan, Indivar Sivanathan. **Web Masters:** Nitya Nadesan, Sadhunathan Nadesan. **Distribution:** USA: Ingram Periodicals, New Leaf, EBSCO Subscription Services, OneSource, Ubiquity. Europe: SWETS Subscription Service. Malaysia and Singapore: Sanathana Dharma Publications. India: Central News Agency Limited, Delhi. Mauritius: CODIP. Trinidad: Pandit Narendra & Ashwinee Ragoonanan. **Printer:** RR Donnelley, Kansas City, Missouri.

## IN MY OPINION

# Hail Hinduism's Homemakers

## How the housewife finds and gives strength to family and community through her sacred role

BY DEEPTI RAWAT PAIKRAY

OFTEN, TO MY DISMAY, I hear dear friends of mine rationalizing their work as unpaid homemakers. Yet others unconsciously give in to societal, family or ego pressures to climb the corporate ladder, sadly equating success with material acquisition. Both groups during various stages in life confess to barrenness within, few able to trace its roots to a spiritual drought. Only a minority transcend this emotional moratorium to find peace, purpose and meaning. Paramahansa Yogananda aptly elucidates, "It is spiritual poverty, not material lack, that lies at the core of all human suffering."

Like the priest, a homemaker is the high priestess of her dwelling. As a temple without a priest loses the power to provide spiritual sustenance to its devotees, so a homemaker out of balance with her divine nature falls short of nourishing the physical, emotional and spiritual well being of her family. Domestic work and ritual worship are the two wheels of her life's journey, held together by the axle of spirituality. The two are not necessarily separate. If domestic chores show up as drudgery, performance of religious rituals renders a mystical and comforting influence on a homemaker's life, helping her to recoup and recover from daily struggles.

Today, rituals have been curtailed and are often ignored. Yet what saves them from mere rote observance is the depth of feeling of the supplicant, transforming ritual into a living tradition, a live wire between the spiritual and terrestrial. Neetu, a suburban housewife, on the advice of her yoga teacher, performs her tasks to a background of sacred chants. To her, total centering in the mundane chores elevates it to a working meditation, relieving stress.

Kavita Chaddha, a corporate executive, harried mother and homemaker on the go, too rushed to perform a morning puja, chants mantras while in transit to work. In her words, the ritual "connects me to the



Supreme Source, better preparing me for the day ahead." I have seen female commuters on Mumbai and Delhi public transit during peak hours religiously reciting prayers, seeking succor amidst the surrounding chaos. Some abstain from partaking of food until it has been offered to the Lord, and others guard the threshold of their domestic arena by drawing auspicious

floor designs.

These rituals may seem innocuous, but they confirm the homemaker as a higher conduit for ancestral traditions, thus ensuring the continuity of our culture and beliefs. To keep our traditions is to keep the strength of our families and ultimately the strength of our Hindu community. This conscious rendering of responsibilities has initiated in me an appreciation of the dignity and divinity in my role as a homemaker.

Swami Tathagatananda of the Vedanta Society in New York, during a discourse on the universal nature of the Divine Mother's love, mentioned that often we fail to acknowledge the divine spark within us. The popular book *Loving Ganesha* by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami explains that Lord Ganesha has five great *shaktis*, or positive powers, that render a stabilizing influence in one's life. The foremost *shakti* is harmony within the family—the most difficult to achieve. Satguru quotes the *Tirukural*: "If love abounds in the home and virtue prevails, the home is perfect and its end fulfilled."

It is imperative that the family acknowledges the homemaker as the centrifugal force in each home, to be cherished for her labors. To repeat Swami Tathagatananda's expressions, the mother in each home is the divine manifestation of Shakti, the feminine power of the universe, and like the celestial spirit, an expression of unselfish love.

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## BRIEFLY...

### PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA HAS

appointed Preeta Bansal, a leading Indian-American lawyer, as General Counsel and Senior Policy Advisor at the Office of Management (OMB) and Budget at the White House. Since 2003, Bansal has been a commissioner of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, serving as chair from 2004–2005.

### THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH CLAIMED

a major legal victory in January when California's Supreme Court ruled that breakaway parishes do not have the right to keep Church property if they secede from the national denomination. Dissident breakaway members of the St. James Church were denied the rights to take Church property

with them. The ruling may ripple across church and state lines as well, according to legal scholars, bolstering denominations locked in similar battles. Hindu organizations would also be affected by such rulings.

### GANESHA GOES PUBLIC IN

Pasadena, California, where the Pacific Asia Museum will host "Discovering Ganesha: Remover of Obstacles." From March 18 to September 20, 2009, visitors will experience the art and culture of Ganesha festivals through contemporary photographs, installations and multimedia components. It is based on the work of photographer Shana Dressler and the 11th–19th century artists who painted and carved the ancient statues of Lord Ganesha in the collection.





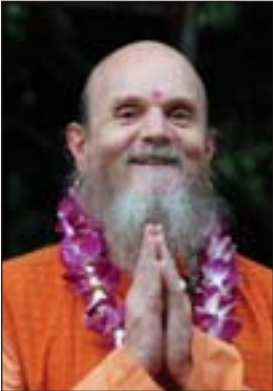
PUBLISHER’S DESK

# Introduction to Hinduism

Our publisher offers a basic summary that you can proudly present to gatherings in your community

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

Hindus in the West are sometimes invited to give a talk explaining their religion at a local college, schoolroom, interfaith group or even a Christian church. Some have confided to me that they do not feel qualified to give such a presentation. There is clearly a need for an authentic, non-academic introduction to Hinduism that can be presented with confidence on such occasions. I prepared this Publisher’s Desk (drawn from our book *What Is Hinduism?*) as a broad summary of our faith that can be drawn upon to properly educate others in the basics of Hinduism, minus all the misconceptions and myths. You can get the text here: [www.himalayanacademy.com/intro](http://www.himalayanacademy.com/intro)



IF YOU ASK GOOGLE “WHAT IS HINDUISM?” YOU WILL GET SOME 39,000 results. Many are from outsiders offering their best take; many are from antagonists taking their best shot. Too few are knowledgeable; fewer still are authentic. Rare is the answer that goes beyond parochial sectarian understandings; scarcely any encompasses the huge gamut implied in the question. For these reasons alone, this introduction to Hinduism was inevitable.

HINDUISM TODAY magazine founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001), well understood the challenges that all religions face in today’s world, whether from outside or within. He wrote that every religion consists of the spiritual precepts, practices and customs of a people or society—transmitted from generation to generation—that maintain the connection with higher realms of consciousness, thus connecting man to God and keeping alive the highest ideals of culture and tradition. Gurudeva, as he was affectionately known, observed that if this transmission misses even one generation, a religion can be lost for all time, left to decay in the dusty libraries of history, anthropology and archeology. He strove to protect the religion he loved so dearly. He would ask rhetorically, “Where are the once prominent religions of the Babylonians, Egyptians, Aztecs, Mayans, American Indians or Hawaiians?” Little remains of them. Not long ago it was feared by some and hoped by many that Hinduism—the religion of a billion people, one sixth of the human race living mostly in India—would meet the same fate. That it survived a history of religious conquest and extermination that wiped out virtually every other ancient religion is exceptional.

Ironically, this noble faith, having withstood the ravages of invasion, plunder and brutal domination by foreign invaders for over a thousand years, stumbled into the 20th century to meet the subtler forces of secularism and the temptations of materialism. Christian propaganda, fabricated by 16th-century Jesuit missionaries, empowered by the 19th-century British Raj and carried forth today by the Western and Indian media, had dealt heavy blows over the centuries to the subjugated, prideless Hindu identity. A typical Christian tactic was to demean the indigenous faith, impeaching it as rife with superstition, idolatry, antiquated values, archaic customs and unpteen false Gods. India’s Communist/secular media stressed caste abuse and wretched social ills, branding as radical, communal and fundamentalist all efforts to stand strong for anything Hindu.

But an unexpected Hindu resurgence has burst forth across the

globe in the last twenty years, driven in part by the Hindu diaspora and in part by India’s newfound pride and influence. Hinduism entered the 21st century with fervent force as recent generations discovered its treasures and its relevance to their times. Hinduism is going digital, working on its faults and bolstering its strengths. Leaders are stepping forth, parents are striving for ways to convey to their children the best of their faith to help them do better in school and live a fruitful life. Temples are coming up across the Earth by the thousands. Communities are celebrating Hindu festivals, parading their Deities in the streets of Paris, Berlin, Toronto and Sydney in grand style without worrying that people might think them odd or “pagan.” Yoga is being universally practiced, in all faith communities. Eloquent spokesmen are now representing Hinduism’s billion followers at international peace conferences, interfaith gatherings and discussions about Hindu rights. Hindu students in high schools and universities are going back to their traditions, turning to the Gods in the temples, not because their parents say they should, but to satisfy their own inner need, to improve their daily life, to fulfill their souls’ call. When it comes time to explain our religion in any of these settings, we offer the following:

### MANY FAITHS UNDER ONE NAME

A major reason why those new to Hinduism find it difficult to understand is its diversity. Hinduism is not a monolithic tradition. There isn’t a one Hindu opinion on things. And there is no single spiritual authority to define matters for the faith. There are several different denominations, the four largest being Vaishnavism, Saivism, Shaktism and Smartism. Further, there are numberless schools of thought, or sampradayas, expressed in tens of thousands of guru lineages, or paramparas. Each is typically independent and self-contained in its authority. In a very real sense, this grand tradition can be defined and understood as ten thousand faiths gathered in harmony under a single umbrella called Hinduism, or Sanatana Dharma. The tendency to overlook this diversity is the common first step to a faulty perception of the religion. Most spiritual traditions are simpler, more unified and unambiguous.

All too often, despite its antiquity, its profound systems of thought, the beauty of its art and architecture and the grace of its people, Hinduism remains a mystery. Twisted stereotypes abound that would relegate this richly complex, sophisticated and spiritually



rewarding tradition to little more than crude caricatures of snake-charmers, cow-worshippers and yogis lying on beds of nails.

Fortunately, there is an easier, more natural way to approach the vastness of Hinduism. From the countless living gurus, teachers and pandits who offer clear guidance, most seekers choose a preceptor, study his teachings, embrace the sampradaya he propounds and adopt the precepts and disciplines of his tradition. That is how the faith is followed in actual practice. Holy men and women, counted in the hundreds of thousands, are the ministers, the defenders of the faith and the inspirers of the faithful.

### FOUR BASIC PRINCIPLES

One way to gain a simple (though admittedly simplistic) overview is to understand the four essential beliefs shared by the vast majority of Hindus: karma, reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity and dharma. We could say that living by these four principles is what makes a person a Hindu.

**Karma:** *Karma* literally means “deed” or “act” and more broadly names the universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction which governs all life. Karma is a natural law of the mind, just as gravity is a law of matter. Karma is not fate, for man acts with free will, creating his own destiny. The Vedas tell us, if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil. Karma refers to the totality of our actions and their concomitant reactions in this and previous lives, all of which determines our future. It is the interplay between our experience and how we respond to it that makes karma devastating or helpfully invigorating. The conquest of karma lies in intelligent action and dispassionate reaction. Not all karmas rebound immediately. Some accumulate and return unexpectedly in this or other births. The Vedas explain, “According as one acts, so does he become. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action” (*Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.45).

**Reincarnation:** Reincarnation, *punarjanma*, is the natural process of birth, death and rebirth. At death we drop off the physical body and continue evolving in the inner worlds in our subtle bodies, until we again enter into birth. Through the ages, reincarnation has been the great consoling element within Hinduism, eliminating the fear of death. We are not the body in which we live but the immortal soul which inhabits many bodies in its evolutionary journey through samsara. After death, we continue to exist in unseen worlds, enjoying or suffering the harvest of earthly deeds until it comes time for yet another physical birth. The actions set in motion in previous lives form the tendencies and conditions of the next. Reincarnation ceases when karma is resolved, God is realized and moksha, liberation, is attained. The *Vedas* state, “After death, the soul goes to the next world, bearing in mind the subtle impressions of its deeds, and after reaping their harvest returns again to this world of action. Thus, he who has desires continues subject to rebirth” (*Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.6).

**All-Pervasive Divinity:** As a family of faiths, Hinduism upholds a wide array of perspectives on the Divine, yet all worship the one, all-pervasive Supreme Being hailed in the Upanishads. As



**A pious culture:** A young Hindu family share in morning worship, as father performs the traditional rite of worship called puja, honoring and invoking the blessings of the Elephant-Headed Lord of Dharma, a Deity worshiped by Hindus of all lineages.

Absolute Reality, God is unmanifest, unchanging and transcendent, the Self God, timeless, formless and spaceless. As Pure Consciousness, God is the manifest primal substance, pure love and light flowing through all form, existing everywhere in time and space as infinite intelligence and power. As Primal Soul, God is our personal Lord, source of all three worlds, our Father-Mother God who protects, nurtures and guides us. We beseech God’s grace in our lives while also knowing that He/She is the essence of our soul, the life of our life. Each denomination also venerates its own pantheon of Divinities, Mahadevas, or “great angels,” known as Gods, who were created by the Supreme Lord and who serve and adore Him. The *Vedas* proclaim, “He is the God of forms infinite in whose glory all things are—smaller than the smallest atom, and yet the Creator of all, ever living in the mystery of His creation. In the vision of this God of love there is everlasting peace. He is the Lord of all who, hidden in the heart of things, watches over the world of time” (*Krishna Yajur Veda, Shvetashvatara Upanishad* 4.14–15).

**Dharma:** When God created the universe, He endowed it with order, with the laws to govern creation. Dharma is God’s divine law prevailing on every level of existence, from the sustaining cosmic order to religious and moral laws which bind us in harmony with that order. In relation to the soul, dharma is the mode of conduct most conducive to spiritual advancement, the right and righteous path. It is piety and ethical practice, duty





and obligation. When we follow dharma, we are in conformity with the Truth that inheres and instructs the universe, and we naturally abide in closeness to God. Adharma is opposition to divine law. Dharma is to the individual what its normal development is to a seed—the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature and destiny. The *Tirukural* (verses 31–32) reminds us, “Dharma yields Heaven’s honor and Earth’s wealth. What is there then that is more fruitful for a man? There is nothing more rewarding than dharma, nor anything more ruinous than its neglect.”

### HINDUISM’S UNIQUE VALUE TODAY

There are good reasons for Hindus and non-Hindus alike to study and understand the nature of Hinduism. The vast geographical and cultural expanses that separate continents, peoples and religions are becoming increasingly bridged as our world grows closer together. Revolutions in communications, the Internet, business, travel and global migration are making formerly distant peoples neighbors, sometimes reluctantly.

It is crucial, if we are to get along in an increasingly pluralistic world, that Earth’s peoples learn about and appreciate the religions, cultures, viewpoints and concerns of their planetary neighbors. The Sanatana Dharma, with its sublime tolerance and belief in the all-pervasiveness of Divinity, has much to contribute in this regard. Nowhere on Earth have religions lived and thrived in such close and harmonious proximity as in India. For thousands of years India has been a home to followers of virtually every major world religion, the exemplar of tolerance toward all paths. It has offered a refuge to Jews, Zoroastrians, Sufis, Buddhists, Christians and nonbelievers. Today over one hundred million Indians are Muslim, for the most part magnanimously accepted by their majority Hindu neighbors. Such religious amity has occurred out of an abiding respect for all genuine religious pursuits. The oft-quoted axiom that conveys this attitude is “*Ekam sat anekah panthah*,” “Truth is one, paths are many.” What can be learned from the Hindu land that has given birth to Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism and has been a generous protector of all other religions? India’s original faith offers a rare look at a peaceful, rational and practical path for making sense of our world, for gaining personal spiritual insight, and as a potential blueprint for grounding our society in a more spiritually rewarding worldview.

Hinduism boasts teachings and practices reaching back 8,000 years and more, its history dwarfing most other religions. In fact, there is no specific time in history when it began. It is said to have started with time itself. To emphasize the relative ages of the major religions, and the antiquity of Hinduism, Raimon Panikkar, author of *The Vedic Experience*, cleverly reduced them to proportionate human years, with each 100 years of history representing one year of human life. Viewed this way, Sikhism, the youngest faith, is five years old. Islam, the only teenager, is fourteen. Christianity just turned twenty. Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism and Confucianism are twenty-five. Zoroastrianism is twenty-six. Shintoism is in its late twenties. Judaism is a mature thirty-seven. Hinduism, whose birthday remains unknown, is at least eighty years old—the white-bearded grandfather of living spirituality on this planet.

The followers of this extraordinary tradition often refer to it as Sanatana Dharma, the “Eternal Faith” or “Eternal Way of Conduct.” Rejoicing in adding on to itself the contributions of every one of its millions of adherents down through the ages, it brings to the world an extraordinarily rich cultural heritage that embraces religion, society, economy, literature, art and architecture. Unsurprisingly, it is seen by its followers as not merely another religious tradition, but as a way of life and the quintessential foundation of human culture and spirituality. It is, to Hindus, the most accurate possible description of the way things are—eternal truths, natural principles, inherent in



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the universe that form the basis of culture and prosperity. Understanding this venerable religion allows all people to fathom the source and essence of human religiosity—to marvel at the oldest example of the Eternal Path that is reflected in all faiths.

While 860 million Hindus live in India, forming 85 percent of the population, tens of millions reside across the globe and include followers from nearly every nationality, race and ethnic group in the world. The US alone is home to 2.4 million Hindus, roughly two-thirds of South Asian descent and one-third of other backgrounds.

### HINDU SCRIPTURES

All major religions are based upon a specific set of teachings encoded in sacred scripture. Christianity has the *Bible*, for example, and Islam has the *Koran*. Hinduism proudly embraces an incredibly rich collection of scripture; in fact, the largest body of sacred texts known to man. The holiest and most revered are the *Vedas* and *Agamas*, two massive compendia of *shruti* (that which is “heard”), revealed by God to illumined sages centuries and millennia ago. It is said the *Vedas* are general and the *Agamas* specific, as the *Agamas* speak directly to the details of worship, the yogas, mantra, tantra, temple building and such. The most widely known part of the *Vedas* are the *Upanishads*, which form the more general philosophical foundations of the faith.

The array of secondary scripture, known as *smriti* (that which is “remembered”), is equally vast, the most prominent and widely celebrated of which are the *Itihasas* (epic dramas and history—specifically the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) and the *Puranas* (sacred history and mythology). The ever-popular *Bhagavad Gita* is a small portion of the *Mahabharata*. The Vedic arts and sciences, including ayurveda, astrology, music, dance, architecture, statecraft, domestic duty and law, are reflected in an assembly of texts known as *Vedangas* and *Upavedas*. Moreover, through the ages God-Realized souls,



**Fervent faith:** Perhaps nothing better captures the grandness of Hinduism than the Kumbha Mela, here celebrated in Haridwar by tens of millions of devotees. It is the largest human gathering on the planet, a devotional conclave that has been observed for centuries.

he will worship as supreme one Deity chosen from a specific pantheon of Gods. If a Vaishnava Hindu, he will revere Vishnu or one of His earthly incarnations, called avatars, especially Krishna or Rama.

Thus, it is impossible to say all Hindus believe this or that. Some Hindus give credence only to the formless Absolute Reality as God; others accept God as personal Lord and Creator. Some venerate God as male, others as female, while still others hold that God is not limited by gender, which is an aspect of physical bodies. This freedom, we could say, makes for the richest understanding and perception of God. Hindus accept all genuine spiritual paths—from pure monism, which concludes that “God alone exists,” to theistic dualism, which asks, “When shall I know His Grace?” Each soul is free to find his own way, whether by devotion, austerity, meditation, yoga or selfless service.

God is unimaginably transcendent yet ubiquitously immanent in all things. He is creator and He is the creation. He is not a remote God who rules from above, but an intimate Lord who abides within all as the essence of everything. There is no corner of creation in which God is not present. He

is farther away than the farthest star and closer than our breath. If His presence were to be removed from any one thing, that thing would cease to exist.

A crucial point, often overlooked, is that having one Supreme God does not repudiate the existence of lesser Divinities. Just as Christianity acknowledges great spiritual beings who dwell near God, such as the cherubim and seraphim (possessing both human and animal features), so Hindus revere Mahadevas, or “great angels,” who were created by the Supreme Lord and who serve and adore Him. Each denomination worships the Supreme God and its own pantheon of divine beings. The elephant-faced Lord Ganesha is among the most popular, and is perhaps the only Deity worshiped by Hindus of all denominations. There are Gods and Goddesses of strength, yoga, learning, art, music, wealth and culture. There are also minor divinities, village Gods and Goddesses, who are invoked for protection, health and such earthy matters as a fruitful harvest.

### THE NATURE OF THE SOUL

What does Hinduism say about the soul? The driving imperative to know oneself—to answer the questions “Who am I?” “Where did I come from?” and “Where am I going?”—has been the core of all great religions and schools of philosophy throughout history. Hindu teachings on the nature of self are as philosophically profound as they are pragmatic. We are more than our physical body, our mind, emotions and intellect, with which we so intimately identify every moment of our life, but which are temporary, imperfect and limiting. Our true self is our immortal soul, the eternal, perfect and unlimited inner essence, a pure being of scintillating light unseen by the human eye, undetectable by any of the human senses, which are its tools for living in this physical world.

Our soul is the source of all our higher functions, including knowledge, will and love. It is neither male nor female. The essence

sharing their experience, have poured forth volume upon volume that reveal the wonders of yoga and offer passionate hymns of devotion and illumination. The creation of Hindu scripture continues to this day, as contemporary masters reiterate the timeless truths to guide souls on the path to Divinity.

A clear sign that a person is a Hindu is that he embraces Hindu scripture as his guide and solace through life. While the *Vedas* are accepted by all denominations, each lineage defines which other scriptures are regarded as central and authoritative for its followers. Further, each devotee freely chooses and follows one or more favorite scriptures within his tradition, be it a selection of *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Tirumantiram* or the writings of his own guru. This free-flowing, diversified approach to scripture is unique to the Hindu faith. Scripture here, however, does not have the same place as it does in many other faiths. For genuine spiritual progress to take place, its wisdom must not be merely studied and preached, but lived and experienced as one’s own.

### THE NATURE OF GOD

Some descriptions of Hinduism wrongly state that Hindus do not believe in a one Supreme Being but worship a multiplicity of supreme Gods. A common way that this misconception shows up is in the idea that Hindus worship a trinity of Gods: Brahma, the Creator, Vishnu, the Preserver, and Siva, the Destroyer. To the Hindu, these three are aspects of the one Supreme Being. Indeed, with its vast array of Divinities, Hinduism may, to an outsider, appear polytheistic—a term avidly employed as a criticism of choice, as if the idea of many Gods were primitive and false. But ask any Hindu, and he will tell you that he worships the One Supreme Being, just as do Christians, Jews, Muslims and those of nearly all major faiths. If he is a Saivite, he calls that God Siva. If a Shakta Hindu, he will adore Devi, the Goddess, as the ultimate Divinity. If he is a Smarta Hindu,





of our soul, which was never created, is immanent love and transcendent reality and is identical and eternally one with God. The *Vedas* explain, “The soul is born and unfolds in a body, with dreams and desires and the food of life. And then it is reborn in new bodies, in accordance with its former works. The quality of the soul determines its future body; earthly or airy, heavy or light.”

The *Vedas* teach that the Divine resides in all beings. Our true, spiritual essence is, like God, eternal, blissful, good, wise and beautiful by nature. The joining of God and the soul is known as yoga. We spend so much of our time pursuing beauty, knowledge and bliss in the world, not knowing that these objects of our desire are already within us as attributes of our own soul. If we turn our focus within through worship and meditation, identifying with our true spiritual self, we can discover an infinite inner treasure that easily rivals the greatest wealth of this world.

Hinduism is a mystical religion, leading the devotee to personally experience the Truth within, finally reaching the pinnacle of consciousness where the realization is attained that man and God are one. As divine souls, we are evolving into union with God through the process of reincarnation. We are immortal souls living and growing in the great school of earthly experience in which we have lived many lives. Knowing this gives followers a great security, eliminating the fear and dread of death. The Hindu does not take death to be the end of existence, as does the atheist. Nor does he look upon life as a singular opportunity, to be followed by eternal heavenly existence for those souls who do well, and by unending hell for those who do not. Death for the Hindu is the most exalted of experiences, a profound transition from this world to the next, simultaneously an end and a new beginning.

Despite the heartening glory of our true nature spoken of in scripture, most souls are unaware of their spiritual self. This ignorance or “veiling grace” is seen in Hinduism as God’s purposeful limiting of awareness, which allows us to evolve. It is this narrowing of our awareness, coupled with a sense of individualized ego, that allows us to look upon the world and our part in it from a practical, human point of view. The ultimate goal of life, in the Hindu view, is called moksha, liberation from rebirth. This comes when earthly karma has been resolved, dharma has been well performed and God is fully realized. All souls, without exception, are destined to achieve the highest states of enlightenment, perfect spiritual maturity and liberation, but not necessarily in this life. Hindus understand this and do not delude themselves that this life is the last. While seeking and attaining profound realizations, they know there is much to be done in fulfilling life’s other three goals: righteousness, wealth and pleasure.

In some Hindu traditions, the destiny of the soul after liberation is perceived as eternal and blissful enjoyment of God’s presence in the heavenly realms, a form of salvation given by God through grace, similar to most Abrahamic faiths. In others, the soul’s destiny is perfect union in God or in the Infinite All, a state of oneness.

### THE NATURE OF THE WORLD

From the Hindu perspective, the world is the place where our destiny is shaped, our desires fulfilled and our soul matured. Without the world, known as maya, the soul could not evolve through experience. In the world, we grow from ignorance into wisdom, from darkness into light and from a consciousness of death to immortality. The whole world is an ashram in which all are evolving spiritually. We must love the world, which is God’s creation. Those who despise,

hate and fear the world do not understand the intrinsic goodness of all. The world is a glorious place, not to be feared. The *Vedas* advise, “Behold the universe in the glory of God, and all that lives and moves on Earth. Leaving the transient, find joy in the Eternal.”

There is a false concept, commonly found in academic texts, that Hinduism is world-negating. This depiction was foisted upon the world by 19th-century Western missionary Orientalists traveling in India for the first time and reporting back about its starkest and strangest aspects, not unlike what Western journalists tend to do today. The wild-looking, world-renouncing yogis, taking refuge in caves, denying the senses and thus the world, were of sensational interest, and their world-abandonment became, through the scholars’ eyes, characteristic of the entire religion. Hinduism’s essential, time-tested monastic tradition makes it no more world-negating than Christianity or Buddhism, which likewise have traditions of renunciate men and women living apart from the world in spiritual pursuits.

While Sanatana Dharma proudly upholds such severe ways of life for the few, it is very much a family-oriented faith that supports acquisition of wealth, the pursuit of life’s pleasures and a full engagement in society’s spiritual, intellectual and emotional joys. The vast majority of followers are engaged in family life, firmly grounded in responsibilities in the world. Young Hindu adults are encouraged to marry; marriages are encouraged to yield an abundance of children; children are guided to live in virtue, fulfill duty and contribute to the community. The emphasis is not on self-fulfillment and freedom but on duty and the welfare of the community, as expressed in the phrase, “*Bahujan hitaya, bahujan sukhaya*,” meaning “the welfare of the many and the happiness of the many.”

Hindu scriptures speak of three worlds of existence: the physical, subtle and causal. The physical plane is the world of gross or material substance in which phenomena are perceived by the five senses. It is the most limited of worlds, the least permanent and the most subject to change. The subtle plane is the mental-emotional sphere that we function in through thought and feeling and reside in fully during sleep and after death. It is the astral world that exists within the physical plane. The causal plane pulsates at the core of being, deep within the subtle plane. It is the superconscious world where

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the Gods and highly evolved souls live and can be accessed through yoga and temple worship.

Hindus believe that God created the world and all things in it. He creates and sustains from moment to moment every atom of the seen physical and unseen spiritual universe. Everything is within Him. He is within everything. God created us. He created time and gravity, the vast spaces and the uncounted stars. Creation is not the making of a separate thing, but an emanation of Himself. God creates, constantly sustains the form of His creations and absorbs them back into Himself. According to Hinduism, the creation, preservation and dissolution of the universe is an endless cycle. The creation and preservation portion of each cycle is a period of approximately 309 trillion years, at which point Mahapralaya, the Great Dissolution, occurs. Mahapralaya is the absorption of all existence—including time, space and individual consciousness, all the worlds and their inhabitants—in God, a return of all things to the source, sometimes likened to the water of a river returning to the sea. Then God alone exists until He again issues forth creation.

### HINDUISM IN PRACTICE

Hinduism has three sustaining pillars: temple worship, scripture and the guru-disciple tradition. Around these all spiritual disciplines revolve, including prayer, meditation and ritual worship in the home and temple, study of scripture, recitation of mantras, pilgrimage to holy places, austerity, selfless service, generous giving, good conduct and the various yogas. Festivals and singing of holy hymns are dynamic activities.

Temples hold a central place of importance in Hindu life. Whether they be small village sanctuaries or towering citadels, they are esteemed as God’s consecrated abode. In the temple Hindus draw close to the Divine and find a refuge from the world. God’s grace, permeating everywhere, is most easily known within these holy precincts. It is in this purified milieu, where the three worlds (physical, astral and causal) commune most perfectly, that devotees can establish harmony with God, the Gods and their angelic helpers, called devas. Traditional temples are specially sanctified, possessing a ray of spiritual energy connecting them to the celestial worlds.

Temple rituals, performed by Hindu priests, take the form of puja,

**A dynamic clergy:** Traditional priests, 121 in all, pose at Sringeri Sadhana Center in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, during a break in the 1997 Vedic worship ceremony, the biggest ever performed on American soil

..... a ceremony in which the ringing of bells, passing of flames, presenting of offerings and intoning of chants invoke the devas and Gods, who then come to bless and help the devotees. Personal worship during puja may be an expression of festive celebration of important events in life, of adoration and thanksgiving, penance and confession, prayerful supplication and requests, or contemplation at the deepest levels of superconsciousness. The stone or metal Deity images enshrined in the temple are not mere symbols of God and the Gods; they are not mere inert idols but the forms through which divine love, power and blessings flood forth from the inner world of the Gods into this physical world. Devout Hindus adore the image as the Deity’s physical body, knowing that the God or Goddess is actually present and conscious in it during puja, aware of devotees’ thoughts and feelings and even sensing the priest’s gentle touch on the metal or stone.

Priests, known as *pujaris*, hold a central place of honor and importance. Each temple has its own staff of priests. Some temples appoint only one, while others have a large extended family of priests to take care of the many shrines and elaborate festivals. Most are well trained from early childhood in the intricate liturgy. These men of God must be fully knowledgeable of the metaphysical and ontological tenets of the religion and learn hundreds of mantras and chants required in the ritual worship. Generally, *pujaris* do not attend to the personal problems of devotees. They are God’s servants, tending His temple home and its related duties, never standing between the devotee and God. Officiating priests are almost always married men, while their assistants may be unmarried young men or widowers.

Hindus consider it most important to live near a temple, as it is the center of spiritual life. It is here, in God’s home, that the devotee nurtures his relationship with the Divine. Not wanting to stay away too long, he visits weekly and strives to attend each major festival, and to pilgrimage to a far-off temple annually for special blessings and a break from his daily concerns.





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For the Hindu, the underlying emphasis of life is on making spiritual progress, while also pursuing one's family and professional duties and goals. He is conscious that life is a precious, fleeting opportunity to advance, to bring about inner transformation, and he strives to remain ever conscious of this fact. For him work is worship, and his faith relates to every department of life.

Hinduism's spiritual core is its holy men and women—millions of sadhus, yogis, swamis, *vairagis*, saints and satgurus who have dedicated their lives to full-time service, devotion and God Realization, and to proclaiming the eternal truths of Sanatana Dharma. In day-to-day life, perhaps no facet of dharma is as crucial as the spiritual teacher, or satguru. These holy men and women are a living spiritual force for the faithful. They are the inspirers and interpreters, the personal guides who, knowing God themselves, can bring devotees into God consciousness. Hindus believe that the blessing—whether a look, a touch or even a thought—coming from such a great soul helps them in their evolution, changes patterns in their life by cleaning up areas of their subconscious mind that they could not possibly have done for themselves. They further believe that if his shakti is strong enough, and if they are in tune with him enough, they will be empowered to really begin to meditate.

In all Hindu communities there are gurus who personally look after the spiritual practices and progress of devotees. Such preceptors are equally revered whether they are men or women. In few other religions are women allowed such access to the highest seats of reverence and respect.

Within the Hindu way is a deeply rooted desire to lead a productive, ethical life, following dharma. Among the many virtues instilled in followers are truthfulness, fidelity, contentment and avoidance of greed, lust and anger. A cornerstone of dharma is ahimsa, noninjury toward all beings. Vedic rishis who revealed dharma proclaimed ahimsa as the way to achieve harmony with our environment, peace between people and compassion within ourselves. Devout followers tend to be vegetarian and seek to protect the environment. Many individuals of all faiths are concerned about our environment and properly preserving it for future generations. Hindus share this concern and honor and revere the world around them as God's creation. Their traditions have always valued nature and cared for it. They find it natural to work for the protection of the Earth's diversity and resources to achieve the goal of a secure, sustainable and lasting environment.

Selfless service to God and humanity, known as *seva*, is widely pursued as a way of softening the ego and drawing close to the Divine. Charity, *dana*, is expressed through myriad philanthropic

**Divine light:** *At the height of puja, a priest lights the sacred lamp which he will lovingly wave before the Deity as an act of veneration, carrying out liturgy that is thousands of years old. Such ceremonies facilitate communion between this physical world and the realms of the Gods and angels.*

.....

activities, especially feeding others.

Hindus wear sectarian marks, called *tilaka*, on their foreheads as sacred symbols, distinctive insignia of their heritage. Rather than burial, they prefer cremation of the body upon death, which quickly releases the soul from its earthly frame, allowing it to continue its evolutionary journey.

Perhaps one of Hinduism's most refreshing characteristics is that it encourages free and open thought. Scriptures and gurus encourage followers to inquire and investigate into the nature of Truth, to explore worshipful, inner and meditative regimens to directly experience the Divine. This openness is at the root of Hinduism's famed tolerance of other cultures, religions and points of view, encapsulated in the adage, "*Ekam sat viprah bahuda vadanti*," meaning "Truth is one, the wise describe it in different ways." The Hindu is free to choose his path, his way of approaching the Divine, and he can change it in the course of his lifetime. There is no heresy or apostasy in Hinduism. This, coupled with Hinduism's natural inclusiveness, gives little room for fanaticism, fundamentalism or closed-mindedness anywhere within the framework of Hinduism. It has been aptly called a threshold, not an enclosure.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, renowned philosopher and president of India from 1962 to 1967, summarizes in *The Hindu View of Life*: "The Hindu recognizes one Supreme Spirit, though different names are given to it. God is in the world, though not as the world. He does not merely intervene to create life or consciousness, but is working continuously. There is no dualism of the natural and the supernatural. Evil, error and ugliness are not ultimate. No view is so utterly erroneous, no man is so absolutely evil as to deserve complete castigation. There is no Hell, for that means there is a place where God is not, and there are sins which exceed His love. The law of karma tells us that the individual life is not a term, but a series. Heaven and Hell are higher and lower stages in one continuous movement. Every type has its own nature which should be followed. We should do our duty in that state of life to which we happen to be called. Hinduism affirms that the theological expressions of religious experience are bound to be varied, accepts all forms of belief, and guides each along his path to the common goal. These are some of the central principles of Hinduism. If Hinduism lives today, it is due to them."



# Nine Beliefs of Hinduism

These nine beliefs summarizing the essential Hindu theology are drawn from chapter fourteen of our book *What Is Hinduism?* That chapter also presents nine corresponding beliefs of Christianity, which can be referenced if your talk is being given to a Christian group. Seeing the two side-by-side is quite revealing for those understanding Hinduism for the first time.

- 1 Reverence for Our Revealed Scriptures**

Hindus believe in the divinity of the *Vedas*, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the *Agamas* as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma. Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end.
- 2 All-Pervasive Divinity**

Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.
- 3 Three Worlds and Cycles of Creation**

Hindus believe there are three worlds of existence—physical, astral and causal—and that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.
- 4 The Laws of Karma and Dharma**

Hindus believe in karma—the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds—and in dharma, righteous living.
- 5 Reincarnation and Liberation**

Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and *moksha*—spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth—is attained. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.
- 6 Temples and the Inner Worlds**

Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.
- 7 Yoga Guided by a Satguru**

Hindus believe that a spiritually awakened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.
- 8 Compassion and Noninjury**

Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, "noninjury."
- 9 Genuine Respect for Other Faiths**

Hindus believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.





## LETTERS

### My Outlook Has Changed

I simply want to say thank you for putting together a comprehensive and wonderful resource for all aspiring seekers of truth. Since I began reading HINDUISM TODAY and *Dancing with Siva* (by the magazine's founder), my outlook has changed so much. I am grateful to you for your wonderfully researched, insightful articles about everything an aspiring seeker like me needs to know.

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### Capital Punishment

As a lawyer, I was very impressed when I came across the article "Capital Punishment, Time to Abandon It" by Mahua Das (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2006) while surfing your website. It was a pleasure to read. My grandfather, Mr. Lekh Raj Mehta, is a Jain legal expert currently practicing in the High Court of Rajasthan. He, too, was excited to see that he was quoted in the section "How the World's Religions View Capital Punishment."

RAMIT MEHTA  
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### More on Amma, Please

Thank you from the bottom of my heart, for it is through your magazine that I found my guru, Mata Amritanandmayi Devi. I do feel that Amma should be featured in HINDUISM TODAY once in a while. I don't have enough words to describe the beauty of your magazine. It really teaches everything about Hinduism around the world. May it live long.

SHASHI KHER  
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### Hindu History for Children

It was immensely elating to read the issue on "Teaching Kids the Truth About India's Amazing History" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2008). The issue elicits the richness of Hindu culture and Indian history. Thanks for putting such a wonderful issue together.

PRIYA IYENGAR  
ALISA VIEJO, CALIFORNIA, USA  
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I would like to personally commend the editor and writers of the Apr/May/June, 2007, edition that disputes the Californian (and otherwise American) methods of teaching Hinduism in grade schools. As a student, I have read the textbooks and learned exactly what HINDUISM TODAY's lesson counters. Now, as a pre-medical student, I have had some serious debates about differences in

religious points of view on ethical issues in modern-day medicine. I feel that students at the collegiate level carry gross misinterpretations of cultures based on their earliest teachings from grade school. This is why I think HINDUISM TODAY's model history lessons are so crucial in developing a young mind and providing it with facts, so that cultural perspectives of other religions do not become distorted later on at the professional level. Join me in congratulating the authors of this article not only for their initial idea, but their strong will, effort and energy spent in compiling a small, factual representation (and summary) of Hinduism.

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### Inter-faith Dialogue

I read an article in Hindu Press International (Nov 23, 2008) in which Pope Benedict XVI was quoted to have said that Marcello Pera's book *Why We Must Call Ourselves Christian* "explained with great clarity" that "an inter-religious dialogue in the strict sense of the word is not possible" and that "a true dialogue is not possible without putting one's faith in parentheses." At least the pope is honest! All along, my own position has been that inter-faith dialogues are useless if Christians and Muslims do not accept and respect other faiths as equal and entitled to the same sovereign rights as they are. This they will not do because of their theological claim of exclusiveness, their monopoly on Truth and God. While inter-faith dialogue is thus doomed to failure, it is good for both politics and public relations. It is also good for us Hindus, because it offers an opportunity to sit at the table and proclaim our equality.

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### Holiday Choices

My wife and I have been both of the types of parents Vidya Bhide described in her letter ("Dealing with Holidays," Jan/Feb/Mar, 2009). In our early years in the USA, we celebrated Christmas in a festive way. But on one Christmas day, when I asked my son, then 7, why he was so thrilled about Christmas while Diwali came and went without being noticed, he gave me a chilling answer: "Dad, this is America. Doesn't that mean its all about Christmas and Jesus?" This honest answer changed our family life. Within a day we registered both our kids in a Balvihar. We performed many religious related activities with them and later I became the president of that Balvihar. I am happy to say

that our involvement changed the outlook of our children about Hinduism. Both our kids, now 22 and 26, look forward to a lavish gift for Diwali. We decorate our house for Diwali and put lights on all the windows. Every Diwali I also send about 50 Diwali cards to my Hindu friends and relatives. Unfortunately, they return the favor by sending me Christmas cards! I wonder why they don't think of me on Eid ul-Fitr or Rosh Hashanah? I must thank my son for giving me a timely wake-up call to change our practices at home. I hope parents will pay attention to what Vidyaji has to say, otherwise they may face major disappointments later in life.

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### Cherishing Forgiveness

I saw your article about forgiveness in Hinduism ("Forgiving Others is Good for Your Health," Nov, 1997). I did what the article said, to forgive and forget past bad experiences. It worked magically. I have burned the pages on which I wrote all my resentments and bad experiences, and as I saw the burning paper, I was relieved of the emotional pain. Thank you.

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### A Fraudulent Mission

David Frawley's recent article on Christian missionaries ("A Fraudulent Mission," Oct/Nov/Dec, 2008) presents the tip of a much bigger iceberg. Islam and Christianity have always detested Hinduism and sought its demise, if not through proselytizing and forced conversions, then through outright violence. Dictators and Marxists hate the Sanatana Dharma because they are materialists who crave total control. In spite of India's rapid development since independence, its material and scientific progress, its peaceful relationship with almost every country on the planet, its rapid economic and technological growth, its development of the world's second largest middle class, its efforts to overcome caste prejudice and injustice, as well as hunger and lack of education, its efforts to guarantee religious freedom for all who live within her borders, its commitment to democracy and freedom, Hinduism is still widely reviled by a vast, Western, asuric intelligence as being evil, backward, degenerate, primitive, anti-Christ, satanic, infidel and on and on.

Why is India the target of so much hatred, sabotage and violence? There is no empirical reason to justify it. There is, however, a spiritual reason, which is that, consciously or



subconsciously, India's and Hinduism's enemies are well aware of the subtle and sattvic power of the Sanatana Dharma.

One other point: those persons who call themselves Hindus and who imitate the violent methods used by fanatics of other faiths in the name of defending Hinduism are as much puppets of the asuric intelligence as are Islamic jihadis, Christian proselytizers and the militant separatist movements which seek to break India apart. Traditionally, India has had its warrior class, the kshatriyas, and in modern times that class should be responsible for her military and police services while protecting her constitution and legal system. Hindus who take the law into their own hands and commit violence against other communities are not kshatriyas; they are simply terrorists and criminals. Hindus must be careful to not allow asuric forces to take over their own minds and hearts in order to perpetrate violence in the name of Hinduism. The asuras know that if they succeed in corrupting the consciousness of Hindus, they will win the war. What better way to put an end to the Sanatana Dharma than to destroy it from within?

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### Why Terrorists Kill

When terrorists shoot or bomb innocents, they shout that they are doing this in the name of their God. One must understand that these are religions that worship God

made in the image of a king. When men were brought before the king, they fell to their knees and shook with fear, hence these religions' "fear of God."

But Hinduism and Buddhism are parent/teacher faiths. A good teacher encourages his students to ask questions, be open-minded, explore new ideas, respect others' ideas and make decisions on their own. Our God does not issue commandments, laws or judgments. A Hindu's goal is not a flesh-happy heaven, but moksha, a pure enlightened state. God is our teacher and guide in this endeavor. For Hindus, one life is not enough, and so we are born again and again. Karma teaches us that we are responsible for our actions. A teacher can only point us to the right path; it is up to us to follow it. If we make mistakes, God wants us to take responsibility and work towards correcting it. We are children/devotees of God, not his subjects, slaves or servants. We should never fear God. In a parent/teacher faith there is no room for a hell, a place where God tortures defenseless people. This is a human idea that somehow holds that inflicting physical pain will make them better people. We know that is not true. King religions need hell as a place to hold bad people and disloyal subjects. But a mother would not torture her own child, nor does a teacher beat his students. Karma and rebirth is the better way to enlightenment.

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## Corrections

✓ In *Quotes & Quips* (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2009), Swami Chinmayanandaji's Mahasamadhi date was incorrectly labeled as 1922. He lived from 1916 to 1992.

✓ In "Facing Dalit Issues" (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2009), Sri Kalidoss Swamigal, who is quoted, is not a Dalit, as might be inferred, but a champion of the community.

✓ The article "1838: South Indian Dancers Tour Europe" (Jan-Feb-Mar, 2009) was based largely upon the research of Dr. Joep Bor, Professor of Extra-European Performing Arts Studies, Leiden University, Netherlands, as collected from his published works and several personal communications. The article also drew upon the work of Ivor Guest, particularly his book *Gautier on Dance*. These attributions were unintentionally excluded from the article, and the author is grateful to Dr. Bor for his kind assistance in her research.

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

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or e-mailed to: [letters@hindu.org](mailto:letters@hindu.org)

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

## Making a Difference as a Family Project

### How sharing Hinduism brings oneness of mind

WHEN SHE WAS 10 AND IN SIXTH grade, Unnati Shukla of The Woodlands, Texas, was horrified at the way her teacher presented Hinduism. Two years later, HINDUISM TODAY published its now famous article: "Ten Questions about Hinduism." Unnati showed it to the teacher, who had never seen anything on Hinduism produced by Hindus. She was impressed and, from that day, stopped teaching the offensive and aberrant material.

Unnati is now 13, and she, her 16-year-old brother Hriday and their parents share one resolve: to do their utmost to bring Hinduism's golden virtues to light. And HINDUISM TODAY is there to provide the tools for their enlightened mission. "We are blessed," Mrs. Shukla told our staff, "to have you giving us this information in print and espe-



**Shukla family:** Making Hindus aware that knowledge is now abundantly available

cially digitally, where kids spend most of their time." Hriday tells of his friend Rohan, who "felt quite disconnected from everything until I'd shared many copies of the magazine with him. Then life began to look brighter. He is now an enthusiastic Hindu who feels connected, knows what he believes and who he is."

At every opportunity, the Shuklas distribute the magazine and use it to explain aspects of their faith. They teach or have organized a number of classes that over 100 youth and adults attend. They are also helping establish a temple in their locality, north of Houston, which they envision as a center of learning and teaching.

The Shuklas have donated generously to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. "We will continue our support," pledges Dr. Shukla, "so the magazine becomes widespread and a dominant influence, in the way journals representing other cultures are today. We want it to be a major player among the forces that will shape upcoming generations."

Please consider donating to the Hinduism Today Production Fund so that the magazine may continue to grow in quality, in reach and impact. Contact us to receive our Production Fund e-newsletter:

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## QUOTES & QUIPS

You are God. I am God. Only one.  
You cannot separate me from you.

**Satguru Siva Yogaswami** (1872–1964), *Sri Lanka's most revered contemporary mystic*

I believe that the civilization India evolved is not to be beaten in the world. Nothing can equal the seeds sown by our ancestors. Rome went, Greece shared the same fate; the might of the Pharaohs was broken; Japan has become Westernized; of China nothing can be said; but India is still, somehow or other, sound at the foundation. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869–1948), *Indian spiritual leader*

For the Self, all that is seen is but mirage; it lasts but for a moment. Whatever is seen, we know it is not the real "I." Who could call real this personal self that changes every moment? **Adi Shankara**, *9th century Indian philosopher and saint*

Sectarianism, bigotry and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed

this beautiful Earth. They have filled the Earth with violence, drenched it often with human blood, destroyed civilizations and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902), *disciple of Sri Ramakrishna*

Divisions are imaginary lines drawn by small minds. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893–1952), *Founder of Self-Realisation Fellowship*

Life is a loan. Invest wisely. *Anonymous*

Stop all your attachments to false values. In an ever-changing world there is nothing worthwhile for us to desire or weep for. Joys

and sorrows are bound to come in human life; they are just two sides of the same coin. **Swami Chinmayananda** (1916–1992), *founder of the Chinmaya Mission*

Even in search of extraordinary gains, the wise will never speak trivial or useless words. **Tirukkural** 198

Let me tell you the truth: there is nothing wrong in your being in the world. But you must direct your mind towards God; otherwise you will not succeed. Do your duty with one hand and with the other hold to God. After the duty is over, you will hold to God with both hands. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886)

There are two great forces in the universe, silence and speech. Silence prepares, speech creates. The strength of noise and activity is great. But infinite is the strength of stillness and silence, in which great forces prepare for action. To be capable of silence, stillness and illuminated passivity is to be fit for immortality. **Sri Aurobido** (1879–1950)

Like most modern conveniences, ignorance can be very expensive. *Anonymous*

From one seed arises a huge tree; from it comes numerous seeds, each one of which in its turn grows into a tree. No two fruits are alike. Yet it is one life that throbs in every particle of the tree. So, it is the same Atman everywhere. All creation is That. There is beauty in the birds and in the animals. They too eat and drink like us, mate and multiply; but there is this difference: we can realize our true nature, the Atman. Having been born as human beings, we must not waste this opportunity. **Sri Anandamayi Ma**, (1896–1982), *Bengali mystic*

Prayers without action are futile, action without prayers are fatal. *Anonymous*

Frank and Ernest



In today's multicultural world, the truly reliable path to coexistence and creative cooperation must start from what is at the root of all cultures, from what lies infinitely deeper in human hearts or minds than political opinion, convictions, antipathies or sympathies. That is transcendence. To be in harmony with that which we are not, what we do not understand, what seems distant from us in time and space, but with which we are nevertheless mysteriously linked. **Vaclav Havel**, *playwright, writer and former president of the Czech Republic*

A single conversation with a wise man is better than ten years of study. *Chinese proverb*

Science sometimes runs the risk of not seeing the truth, because it does not want to know about miracles. **Jacques Cousteau** (1910–1997), *French explorer, ecologist and filmmaker*

Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel

that you, too, can become great. **Mark Twain**, (1835–1910), *American author*

The saints, sages and satgurus are Hinduism's holy men and women. Saints, devoid of ego, reflect the peace, humility and purity of a devout life. Sages, though perfectly liberated, may outwardly appear detached and ordinary. Satgurus, also fully enlightened, guide others on the path.

**Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

## DID YOU KNOW?

### A Hindu God in the Solar system

FOR TOO LONG, PLANETS IN THE Solar System were named only after Greco-Roman Deities. By the time the International Astronomical Union decided that Gods of other religions should be included, most thought it was too late and no new planets were left to be discovered. But recently, human ingenuity expanded our view of the universe, and several new orbital objects were found, including one named Varuna, after the Hindu God of the Oceans.

Varuna, with a diameter of 800 km, rides a similar orbit to that of Pluto. It has an icy and inhospitable surface, with temperatures estimated at 230°C below zero. Like most planets, Varuna has a spheroid shape, an evidence that it had enough mass to collapse all stardust and rocks into its body. A year on Varuna—the time it takes to orbit the Sun—is

equivalent to 283 Earth years. Varuna is currently a candidate for "dwarf planet" classification, the same category as Pluto.

In Hinduism, Varuna, an older brother to Indra, is the Chief of the Adityas. His realms are water, rain and the celestial ocean, as well as law and the underworld. The *Atharva Veda* portrays Varuna as omniscient keeper of *rita*, cosmic order. He is also one of the guardians of the directions, representing west. In the *Ramayana*, it is told that Varuna helped Rama reach Sri Lanka by keeping the waters still.



IMAGE BY NASA

## BASICS OF HINDUISM

### Hinduism's Third Pillar: Satgurus

THE THREE PILLARS OF HINDUISM are the temples, the scriptures and the satgurus. They sustain and preserve the ancient wisdom. If any two were to disappear, Hinduism would come back from the third, as perfect as it ever was. Here we bring a description of the third pillar, satgurus, in an excerpt from the 12-century Kularnava Tantra.

When the entire universe is looked on as pervaded by the Sivaguru, what mantra can fail to achieve its purpose for the *shishya*? When the satguru is present, no tapas is necessary, no pilgrimage, no fasting nor observances. What he speaks is as scripture.

Feel one with your guru and not separate from him, and do good to all as your own. Whether moving or standing, sleeping or waking, performing japa or making offerings, carry out only the injunctions of your guru with your inner being dwelling in him. As in the vicinity of fire, butter gets melted, so in the proximity of the

holy Sivaguru all bad karmas dissolve. As lighted fire burns up all fuel, dry and moist, so the glance of the Sivaguru burns up in a moment the karmas of the shishya. As the heap of cotton blown up by a great storm scatters in all the ten directions, so the heap of negative karmas is blown away by the compassion of the Sivaguru. As darkness is destroyed at the very sight of the lamp, so is ignorance destroyed at the sight of the holy Sivaguru.

I tell you now that there can be no Liberation without *diksha*, initiation. Nor can there be initiation without a preceptor. Hence the dharma, the shakti and the tradition come down the line of masters, called *parampara*.

Without a satguru all philosophy, knowledge and mantras are fruitless. Him alone the Gods praise who is the satguru, keeping active what is handed down to him by tradition. One should seek with all effort to obtain a preceptor of the unbroken tradition, born of Supreme Siva.



A. MANIVEL



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## Responses to Lesson 1

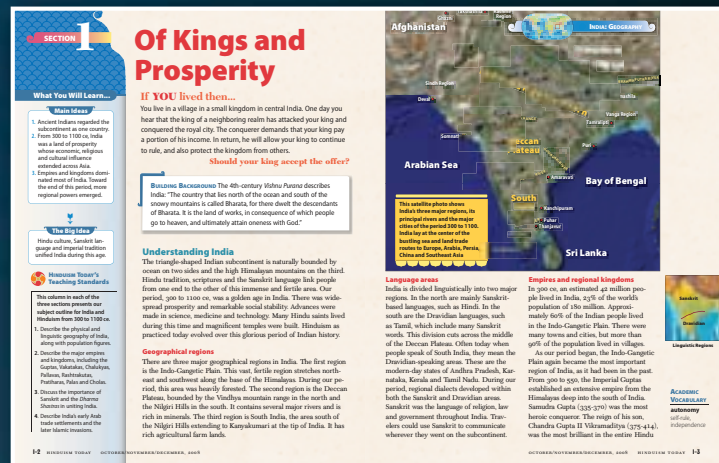
We agree to promote within the US school system the [history lesson] published by *Hinduism Today*... and to enhance the dissemination of it. —**Resolution 3**  
Hindu Mandir Executives Conference, Aug. 12, 2007

...correct, authentic and definitely better than I have seen in any school textbook. —**Shiva G. Bajpai**, Ph.D  
Director, Center for Asian Studies, California State University

I wholeheartedly and unequivocally recommend its use in all official textbooks.

—**Swami Chidanand Saraswati**,  
Founder-Chairman, India Heritage  
Research Foundation, Rishikesh

I could imagine myself recommending this lesson for my college students. —**Jeffery D. Long**, Ph.D, Chair, Department of Religious Studies, Elizabethtown College, PA, USA



## FROM THE AGAMAS

# The Nature of Lord Siva

“He extends His grace to all and gives creatures experience and liberation”

*Ajita Agama, or Ajita Tantra, is the fifth of the 28 Saiva Agamas. This excerpt is from section 2, "The Nature of Siva." It is in the form of a conversation between Lord Siva as Mahadeva and Lord Vishnu as Achyuta.*

**H**E IS THE GROSS, THE SUBTLE AND THE SUPREME; THE manifested, the unmanifested and that which is both; the external, the internal and that which is external-internal; the eternal, the non-eternal and that which is eternal and non-eternal; the male, the female and the third entity which is non-male [and non-female]; wakefulness, dream and deep sleep; the past, the present and the future; the invisible, the visible and that which is visible and non-visible; the spoken, the mental and the act; the instrument of knowledge, the knower and the known; the *atma-tattva*, the *vidya-tattva* and the *Siva-tattva*; the experiencer, the experienced and cause of the experienced; [the impurity] born of maya, that innate in the soul and that from karma; the knowledge and the ignorance; the light and the darkness; the gross and the subtle, the near and the remote; that which is to be left and that which is to be taken; the permanent and the occasional; the superior and the inferior; that which is brought together and that which is scattered; the true and the untrue, the existent and the non-existent.

This Lord [Siva] is all that. There is nothing different from Him. He is the material cause, the *mahat* and the *ahamkara*, the *tanmatras* of sound, touch, color, taste and odor, the [sense-organs] ear, skin, eye, tongue and nose, the organ of speech, hand, the foot, organs of excretion and generation, with the mind, the five [elements] earth, etc., [and the various *tattvas*]. Only He can be the Lord. He is I and you. He is the God, i. e., Brahman etc., the Creators, Kasyapa, etc. He is the seven sages, Moon and Sun, lords of planets. He is the king of Gods. Siva is said to be the universe.

The four *Vedas*, with their secret [section, i. e., *Upanishads*], speak of Him. In the Siddhanta, the *Bhuta Tantra*, the left and right current of tantras, in the *Bhairava Tantra* and other tantras (those of *pashus* and *Pashupata*, etc.), in the Tantra of Vishnu, in the tantras of *bauddhas* and in the science on the lords of directions, in the eighteen *Puranas*, in the six ancillaries [of *Veda*] and in others, in the treatises of yoga, in all [sciences], Nyaya, Vaisesika, etc., whatever any of those sages, after examination, has said to be the true reality, this same eternal Lord of Gods, named Siva, is that.

In the Saiva tradition, Siva is known as free from beginning, middle and end, free by nature from the stain-entirety, powerful, omniscient, endowed with plenitude, non-limited by directions of space, times, etc., beyond the range of speech and mind, free of manifestation, without action, all-pervading, always seeing everything.

The worship of Him can be the inner worship, which is especially for yogins. Men who take pleasure in the practice of yoga, whose mind is purified by the eight components of yoga, yama, etc., worship Him in the middle of the lotus of their heart, no others. The action of worshipping Him is superior. Without His worship, with any other [rite] there is no benefit for embodied souls.

Someone sometimes is entitled to perform the inner worship;  
those who have a little knowledge are entitled to perform the outer



**This Lord is all that:** Lord Siva meditates upon the mantra Namasivaya in this traditional silk miniature painting

worship. Being aware of that, this Lord of Gods, Siva, who stands inside everything, who [desires] to extend His grace to all and gives creatures experience and liberation, this Siva became Sadasiva, whose body is manifested as the five brahma [mantras].

The whole universe entirely is created by Brahman, protected by you and destroyed by me. Thus a relation of material cause and effect is established in us. The nature of body of Siva is told to be in Sadasiva, etc. The nature of material cause is unique and established only in Him. This undecaying Sadasiva is worshiped in the Linga, by us, led by Maheshvara and by all creatures in the world. Such is the second chapter, entitled "Narration of the Nature of Siva," in the great *Tantra* called *Ajita*.

*This translation is by N.R. BHATT, JEAN FILLIOZAT and  
PIERRE-SYLVAIN FILLIOZAT, all of the French Institute of  
Pondicherry, and published by the Indira Gandhi National  
Centre for the Arts as The Great Tantra of Ajita*

*The Vedas and Agamas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, shruti, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1200 BCE), Bible New Testament (100 CE), Koran (630 CE) or Zend Avesta (600 BCE). The oldest portions of the Vedas may date back as far as 6,000 bce. The Saiva Agamas are also ancient, but dating is uncertain.*





**Defending the faith:** HAF joined a coalition of groups challenging the adoption of sixth-grade history books at this 2005 meeting of the California Curriculum Review Commission

FEATURE STORY

# Meet the Young Hindu American Foundation

Pioneering a professional approach to legal, academic and public relations issues which impact Hindus

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

**T**HE DIWALI RESOLUTION PASSED BY the United States Congress, the inclusive revised rules of the Religious Worker Visa Program and the favorable ruling in a lawsuit against the California State Board of Education were not free gifts dropped into the palms of Hindu Americans. Each was a hard-won and costly victory by organized advocates within the Hindu community, chief among them a band of young and savvy second-generation Indian Americans who are the lifeblood of the forward-looking Hindu American Foundation. While the Jewish tradition has been defended by the Anti-Defamation League and B'nai B'rith, and Christianity has the

Catholic League, the Baptist Joint Committee and dozens more, until recently there was no comparable American advocacy group tasked to stand up for Hindu rights both here and abroad. In 2004 the HAF founders, with little more than a profound awareness of the need, stepped boldly, some would say brazenly, into that void.

## Growing up different

These ambitious and plucky Hindus grew up steeped in Western education and culture in an America where there were precious few Hindu temples or overt markers of their faith. Not only have they kept their faith, they have become articulate interpreters, protectors and ambassadors of a religion

which is often misunderstood and maligned. For many Hindu-American children raised in a largely white Christian America, the faith of their parents was an all-too-often embarrassment, something to be hidden from mainstream friends, something they were almost ashamed of and which definitely was not "cool." After all, how do you describe a complex religion which seems to have so many millions of Gods with multiple arms and faces to preteen friends? How do you explain deep philosophical concepts to a class full of American peers, when you don't fully understand them yourself?

While the religious among their American peers worshiped in handsome churches where they sat in polished oak pews, this

generation's Hindu children were commonly driven miles away by their parents to humble, makeshift temples or a meager shrine in someone's basement. Often without understanding why, they removed their shoes and sat on the floor to observe a puja and chant bhajans without knowing the language of the chants and devotional songs. The challenges were many.

"I remember the embarrassment I felt and the incessant teasing I faced after grotesque media depictions of Indian culture, such as in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*," recalls Suhag Shukla, an attorney who grew up in the US in the 70s. "Back then, there were not many people who looked or lived like me, and certainly there was little to no

**Honoring our best:** Key HAF members honor Preeta Bansal (wearing the garland) with the Mahatma Gandhi Award for the Advancement of Religious Pluralism for her service on the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. The Harvard Law School graduate now holds a high post in the Obama administration. With her, from left to right are Sheetal Shah, Aseem Shukla, Nikhil Joshi, Ishani Chowdhury and Mihir Meghani.

familiarity with our traditions, except for cows, poor people and scary Gods."

Miles away, Ishani Chowdhury was growing up in American suburbia, just as lost about her religious identity. "From kindergarten until graduate school, whenever South Asian history or religions were taught, the classes were filled with misconceptions, stereotypical images, misconstrued texts or outdated concepts," she recalls. "The results of that to an impressionable teenager are

inferiority, disgust or even outright shame and hatred of one's own faith and culture. It's not uncommon to see Hindus of my generation being Hindus in name only—not in practice or belief. To compound this," she continued, "my first exposure to Hinduism was during my years in Catholic high school, and that, too, by a former nun who had spent a good portion of her time proselytizing in India. Needless to say, the experience left me puzzled and curious about my faith and

PHOTO COURTESY HAF





**Presented by Hinduism Today to the Hindu American Foundation for its outstanding service in the Hindu cause through educating policy makers, defending religious freedom, joining interfaith efforts and bringing a professional approach to all that it does in advancing the core beliefs and values of the Sanatana Dharma**



**Hindus are one-sixth of the human family. While India is home to 93% of the world's one billion Hindus, nearly 70 million are scattered widely across the globe.**

Then there is Dr. Aseem Shukla, a pedi-

APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2009 HINDUISM TODAY 27





AFP/GETTY IMAGES



NO CREDIT

**HAF rights issues:** (clockwise from above) Protesting Hindus being dispersed with tear gas and water cannons in Kuala Lumpur in 2007; Hindus in Bangladesh have been marginalized since partition as symbolized by this temple Deity smashed in the 1992 anti-Hindu riots; HAF appealed for restraint when the ancient Hindu temple of Preah Vihear on the disputed border of Cambodia and Thailand saw a military standoff; police keep Hindus away as a developer demolishes a functioning Hindu temple in Malaysia



VELUYU



AFP PHOTO/TANG CHHIN SOTHY

the textbooks that had been adopted under the old procedure. "We have to realize," Suhag Shukla explained, "that the judge was in many ways backed into a corner. He found the procedure to be illegal and then ruled that the fruits of the illegality were okay. But had he ruled in any other way, the state of California would have faced the same charge for each and every textbook in use." Such an outcome could possibly have brought to a halt a school system with seven million students.

Was it still worth it? Shukla thinks so, "On the whole, most of our community's concerns were addressed, but it is still going to be the responsibility of Hindu parents to

be proactive in demanding better coverage of Hinduism and India in school textbooks. And you can bet that SBE members will think twice before violating the court-mandated new processes, especially if Hindus are involved."

#### The challenges within

HAF's enviable track record in the public arena is only one side of their story. National Hindu organizations already existed in the United States, all related to Hindu organizations in India. These were run by first-generation immigrants mostly concerned with issues in India that had little to do with what their own children faced in America. As is

traditional (though HAF members don't want to say it), the "elder" system ruled in these organizations, and the voice of youth, even those solidly established in their professions, was marginalized.

Explains Mihir Meghani, "HAF faced the challenge of selling the idea of leadership by qualified young Hindu professionals brought up in the United States as opposed to older immigrants from India. We intended to uniquely position HAF as a Hindu American organization representing all Hindu Americans and not as an 'Indian' group. We said we would run HAF as a group that was going to think and act independently and that was not going to follow the traditional ideology of



Hindu activists in America."

"Some activist groups," Aseem Shukla remembers, "were too identified with politics, communalism and violence in India—something that did not resonate at all with the Hindu constituency we represent at HAF. We developed a very US-based focus, once the group's entire board of directors became comprised of US-advocacy and presented themselves. From there, HAF has evolved a strategy of interacting with elected leaders and of media outreach and thereby established itself as a credible human rights organization."

The Indian community tends to underestimate the need for an advocacy group. Suhag Shukla described their concerns, "Some are fearful of engaging the majority or rocking the boat in the necessary struggle for equal access and rights. In many instances, those community members hold a misconception that standing up for one's rights, especially those of religious freedom, is necessarily anti other religions. Slowly but surely, I think we are convincing many that this is simply not true and, in fact, such a struggle is quintessentially American."

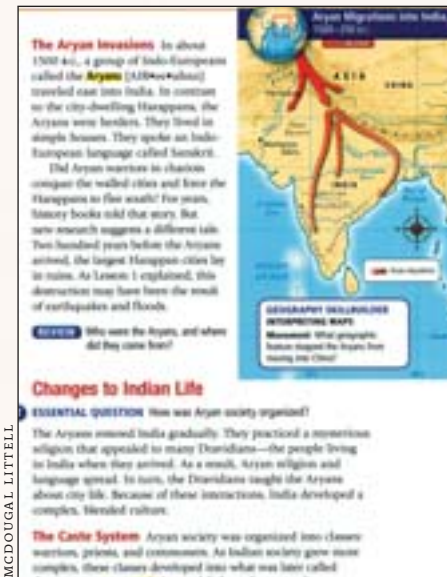
Ishani Chowdhury expanded on this issue, "Many in our community have failed to grasp the need for a collective voice when dealing with issues such as discrimination, hate crimes or unfair zoning restrictions, for example, as it applies to temple permits. The laws may be in the books, but it's up to us to ensure they are upheld."

The US focus, clarified Aseem Shukla, does not mean HAF ignores India. On the contrary, he says, "As second generation Hindu Americans, our concern for India will always be strong. It is, after all, our spiritual homeland, and we support India's emergence as a regional superpower. The threat faced by India from Islamist militancy is a global threat that we have experienced here in the US as well. So we will always advocate against India's adversaries. But we were born in the US, our children are American and our paramount interest is in a pluralistic, tolerant United States that understands and is influenced also by the great message of Sanatana Dharma."

Asked about their funding, Sheetal Shah noted they have 3,000 members, the majority of them first generation Indians. HAF hosts seven to twelve fund-raising events per year throughout the country. "We have a handful of solid higher-end donors," she revealed, "whose generous contributions have largely allowed HAF to increase its full-time staff at a relatively rapid rate. A large percentage of our membership donates between \$50-\$500 per year. Getting that one large donation which could set HAF for years has not yet happened, particularly as many in our community prefer to build schools



VEDIC FOUNDATION



MCDUGAL LITTELL

**California challenge:** (above) HAF's Mihir Meghani (third from right) stands with representatives of the Vedic Foundation, Hindu Student Council and Indian Students Association at the 2005 Curriculum Commission meeting on the disputed history books; (left) a textbook page on the disputed Aryan Invasion; (below) the Hindu Education Foundation who started the challenge



HINDU EDUCATION FOUNDATION

and hospitals back in India. These causes are worthwhile, but so is advocacy in the country where one and one's children live."

#### A full-time staff

Aside from its US-focus, HAF differs from other Hindu community groups in its determined effort to develop a full-time staff. Except for temples, ashrams and Rajiv Malhotra's Infinity Foundation, HINDUISM TODAY is unaware of a single Hindu-oriented organization in the US with even one full-time staff member. That is not a basis upon which complex goals can be accomplished.

Sheetal Shah explains, "Finding dedicated and self-motivated staff to work long hours for less pay is a major challenge. Our community places a huge emphasis on 'stable' career paths—medicine, law, engineering, finance—and our talented youth migrate toward those careers for various reasons.

Working for a non-profit, particularly a smaller and less well-known one, is not highly encouraged within the community. Thus, recruiting individuals willing to devote years towards this cause as full-time staff at a lower pay than they could get elsewhere has been a challenge from when we looked for our first full-time director. It's a challenge we will continue to face as we try to expand our full-time staff—now numbering four—or if we need to replace a current full-time director. We've had a similar struggle in expanding our board of directors and our executive council."

Those who do join full time face a few personal challenges. Suhag Shukla laments, "We've been personally and professionally attacked by certain academics and a few loosely formed, and quite frankly, opaque South Asian groups, who are unable to relinquish or set aside their political ideologies





PHOTOS: COURTESY HAF



and political baggage from India. Through Macarthyesque smear-campaign tactics, these communist academics and groups have tried to paint HAF as an extremist organization. Most people, and more importantly, leaders in public policy and the media, have seen through such tactics. HAF's record as a progressive voice speaks for itself. Whether in the arena of human rights, speaking out against caste discrimination, engaging in broad-based interfaith dialogue or fighting for religious freedom, HAF has been at the forefront. I just can't say the same for the other South Asian organizations who

claim to be progressive or pluralistic." "On the whole, there has never been an outright clash in the mainstream due to my work with HAF," says Sheetal Shah. "Most of my 'American' friends find my role and HAF's work to be unique, interesting and worthwhile for the community. In particular, my Jewish American friends really 'get' the concept of HAF." Yet when it comes to Indian-Americans, the perception of working for HAF is sometimes quite different! Recalls Shah, "I have run across a few Indian American (Hindu) friends who are concerned that HAF might

have 'fundamentalist' leanings." They jump to this conclusion, she explained, not from any study of HAF's website, activities or stated purposes, but as a reaction to the very concept of "Hindu advocacy." On a personal note, Suhag Shukla related how their local paper carried an item on the Ten Commandments case which mentioned her by name. "An individual called me at home the next day," she said, "telling me to go back to my country and that my family and I were going to burn in hell. The caller ID captured his name and number and I quickly realized that he lived only in the next

neighborhood. Needless to say, that entire week, I had a pit in my stomach and didn't let my kids play outside without me there every moment." **Finding, and keeping, volunteers** For a nonprofit organization to be successful, it needs dedicated volunteers. Aseem Shukla explains, "It is actually quite easy to find people with an interest to volunteer—the true test, however, is finding those that can translate initial enthusiasm into concrete, reliable, long-term action on behalf of the group." Mihir Meghani added that many young Hindus in America practice Hinduism differently than their parents. "They are still Hindu," he concedes, "but their focus is on living as Hindu Americans and not as Hindus somehow displaced from India. Thus, our focus on involving Hinduism's global vision in the policy and thought of America appeals to them."

**Getting heard:** HAF devotes a significant amount of time to working with political leaders to address Hindu concerns on the national and international front. (left to right) Suhag Shukla, HAF's managing director and legal counsel; Congressman Jim Wilson of South Carolina addresses HAF reception; Kumar Barve, a leading Maryland politician, receives a HAF recognition; Congressman Jim McDermott of Washington at HAF reception; Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio is garlanded by Ishani Chowdhury. .... was inspired by Swami Vivekananda. He, too, was concerned both by the poverty in India and by conversions of Hindus to other religions. I completely concurred with his idea that the solution lay in a combination of social work as well as in proudly proclaiming and preserving our spiritual and cultural heritage." He joined HAF because the organization was neither religious or political, but one which "interfaced with the institutions of society on behalf of Hinduism" in a professional manner. HAF reaches out for new members through the national fundraisers and its website. To

## Proudly Hindu, Thanks to Our Parents

THE YOUNG LEADERS OF HAF GIVE AN A+ to their parents for imparting Hinduism to them in trying circumstances, often in isolated hamlets far from India. Their testimony serves as encouragement to all Hindu parents dedicated to raising religious children. "My parents, my father in particular, instilled in me my deep pride in Hinduism from childhood," says **Sheetal Shah**. "Although they forced me to sit through various pujas which I did not understand, they always took the time to discuss the philosophical underpinnings of Hinduism with me. They encouraged me to question that within the religion which I did not understand, and helped me search for the answer. This ability to question and probe, so unique within Hinduism, continues to motivate me." **Aseem Shukla** credits his



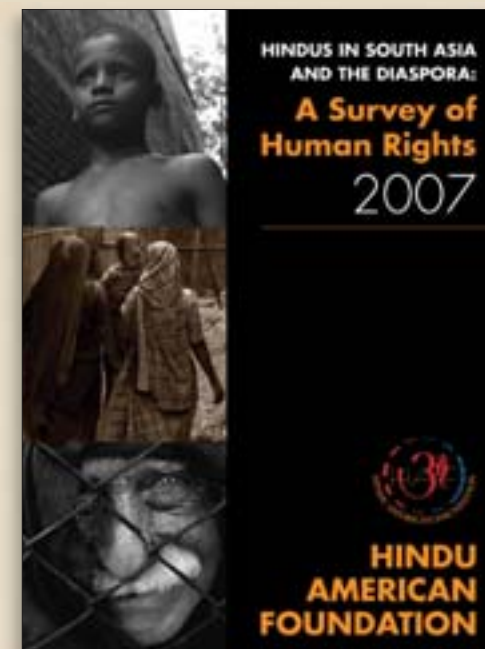
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devout parents for imparting to him a heritage of social service, as he had in his family a freedom fighter, a superintendent of police in post-colonial India and the founders of a Vedic school in Gujarat. **Nikhil Joshi**, who was born in Jacksonville, Florida, away from any major areas of Indian influence, says: "My parents were our sole source for learning about

Hindu dharma, scriptures and teachings, along with a few families in town who shared my parents' interests. We had no access to a Hindu temple." **Pawan Deshpande**, born in Canada and reared in Massachusetts, recalls, "Growing up, we did not have a temple in the nearby vicinity. We made up for that with weekly classes on Hinduism in the basement of a local home. Just as my interest in Hinduism has grown over time, so, too, has the local community, and we now have a Chinmaya Mission temple." **Samir Kalra**, raised in Fremont, California, shares, "My parents were influential in my interest in Hindu philosophy, culture and history. I was fascinated as a child by stories of great Hindu kings, saints and leaders. Going to the local Hindu mandir for religious and cultural events was also a large part of my childhood and adolescence. These experiences helped produce a lasting interest in Hinduism and a sense of pride in being Hindu."

## Hindu Human Rights

THEIR ANNUAL SURVEY OF HINDU RIGHTS has been a major achievement for HAF in educating government leaders, academics, media and the wider public on the plight of Hindu minorities around the world. Samir Kalra explained, "Since the persecution of Hindus rarely attracts media attention or concern from the international community, the annual Human Rights report serves a crucial role in comprehensively documenting human rights abuses against Hindus and advocating on their behalf." "All too often, staffers and Congressmen are unaware of the basic human rights issues faced by Hindus," says Ishani. "The voices of Hindus who face daily legal and physical assaults in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and India's Jammu and Kashmir, to mention a few, are often ignored by larger human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International and the media. Hindus are written off in a few sentences, and their stories silenced forever."

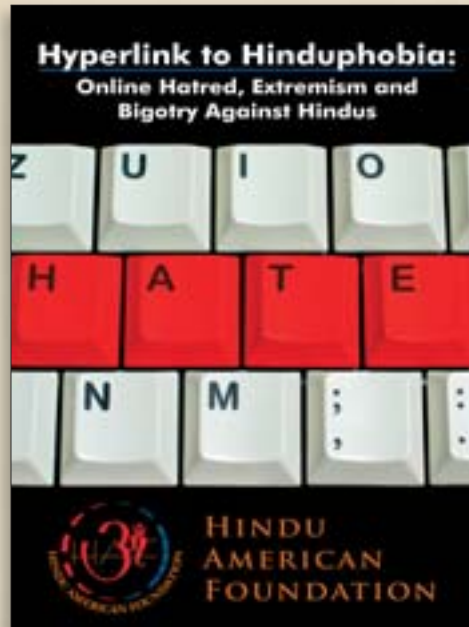




# Combating Bigotry

UNTIL THE HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION published *Hyperlink to Hindu-phobia: Online Hatred, Extremism and Bigotry Against Hindus*, explains Mihir Meghani, "Hindus had not defined what they considered hate speech. The Foundation researched this because we thought it was extremely important to educate people that certain language could incite hate and violence, and that certain language was the equivalent to Hindus of what blacks would consider racist, Muslims would consider Islamo-phobic, or what Jews would consider anti-Semitic."

"With HAF having identified websites that promote such speech, we are able to enter into dialogue with groups seeking to foster a hate-free environment, and we are better able to define what hate speech is for Hindus. Strategically, we need to realize that a large part of missionary work in converting Hindus involves hate speech—either by using hate speech to raise money for conversion or in the process of targeting Hindus for conversion."



gain members, Sheetal Shah says, "We are making an effort to reach out to the younger generation through social networking such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and by reaching out to colleges with large Hindu populations."

## Getting heard, politically

Technically, HAF doesn't "lobby," because most of their effort is in educating public officials about specific issues and not pushing a particular piece of legislation.

They participate in the Annual Legislative Days and Capitol Hill Receptions where US lawmakers and influential Hindu Americans share the dais to discuss issues of concern to Hindu Americans. In 2007, HAF advocates testified at a House of Representatives Congressional Human Rights Caucus briefing on issues in South Asia. At the briefing, Ishani Chowdhury, HAF's Director of Public Policy, highlighted the plight of Hindus in Afghanistan and India's state of Jammu and Kashmir specifically, and urged assembled political leaders, human rights groups, and the media to focus on the non-proselytizing, peaceful populations of Hindus who are facing persecution and discrimination in South Asia and in other parts of the world.

HAF played a key role in the concerted effort by Hindu temples in America to inform Congress of the adverse effects that revisions to the Religious Worker Visa Program would have on Hindu temples and centers. Some of

the proposed changes could have disqualified priests, temple architects, *silpi* stone carvers or other necessary temple workers from entering the country and serving at legitimate institutions. The final revisions, issued in December, 2008, addressed most of the concerns raised by Hindus.

Dealing with Congress and other branches of government is a time-consuming process for Ishani Chowdhury. It takes hours to prepare for and arrange meetings with the appropriate staff members, who will likely grant no more than 15 minutes of their time, of which you have five minutes to present your case. More hours of follow up are required. It's a slow process, Chowdhury explains, because "before a Congressman signs off on anything, it has to be approved by layers of his people—e.g., legislative assistant, press aid, legislative director, chief of staff, etc.—and if there is disagreement, the response may be less than favorable." Moreover, she observed, staffers stay for just a year or two, so one faces a constant process of re-education and reestablishment of trust.

Chowdhury offered this frank insight on the impact of Hindus on the nation's political process: "While the Hindu/Indian community is considered the model minority in terms of upward mobility, education and income, it has failed to use that to their advantage. Indians may host elaborate fund raisers for candidates or take pictures with Con-

gressmen, but will fail to list grievances or issues that plague them and ask that they be addressed. Hence, the candidate walks away with the support of the community, leaving us with nothing but a lightened wallet."

## Hindu human rights

The young advocates of HAF have also taken on the serious matter of persecution of Hindus worldwide, bringing attention to the human rights abuses and ethnic cleansing campaigns in various countries through their annual *Human Rights Report* (sidebar page 25). Its executive summary begins, "The human rights of Hindu citizens are consistently violated in ten countries and one state in India where Hindus constitute a minority: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Fiji, the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, Malaysia, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, and Trinidad and Tobago. This report documents the ongoing violations of human rights in these countries." For Bangladesh, it claims, At least 270 acts of murder, rape, kidnapping, temple destruction, and land grab targeting

Hindus are recorded in this report for the six months in 2007 for which data is available."

Ishani explains the report's purpose, "As a superpower with 2.4 million Hindus residing in the US, and billions of taxpayer dollars spent yearly in appropriations to many of these countries, it is important to continually educate members of Congress as to where and how much is being spent on nations that continue to violate the human rights of their own citizens, and also to demand greater accountability for that amount."

## Caste

HAF is brave enough to concern itself with the social ills of Hindu society. They are compiling a report on caste discrimination, and when the US House of Representatives passed a resolution in 2007 highlighting the issue of social discrimination in India against the lower castes, HAF appreciated this condemnation of the social discrimination faced by Harijans in the subcontinent.

"That discrimination, ostracization and persecution occur against certain segments of society globally is a vivid reality deserving unequivocal condemnation," says Pawan Deshpande. "The government of India already has perhaps the world's most extensive laws against such oppression, matched only by the pervasiveness of its mandated affirmative action system." But neither laws nor programs have solved the problem.

Mihir Meghani calls for change. "Traditions have their place and they provide a culture its shape and essence; however, when these traditions conflict with our modern sensibilities about equality, humanity, justice and goodness, those rites and rituals which rob individuals and groups of their respect and humanity should be stopped."

## Interfaith and community outreach

Forming inter-religion connections is equally important for Hinduism. HAF was invited to join a delegation of Hindu spiritual and lay leaders that visited Israel to attend the Second International Hindu-Jewish Summit organized by the World Council of Religious Leaders (WCORL). Sheetal Shah, Director of Development for HAF, traveled to Israel as a Hindu representative to the summit.

The nine-point Declaration at the Summit reaffirmed the common Hindu and Jewish belief in One Supreme Being both in its formless and manifest aspects; expressed their common worldview of the sanctity of human life and recognized that all religions are sacred for their people and therefore, no one should denigrate or interfere in the religious practice of others. It also affirmed that the swastika is an ancient Hindu symbol that was misappropriated by the Third Reich.

HAF held its fifth annual awareness and education campaign dinner last year, attended by supporters from around Northern California. With over 250 people in attendance, including interfaith leaders from Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities, the event marked HAF's largest turnout and fund raiser. Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi, the highest-ranking state official ever to attend a Hindu event in California, addressed supporters on the importance of Hindu-American advocacy.

HAF was the first Hindu organization to be part of the ONE Campaign, a global advocacy organization uniting millions of people to press government leaders to fight extreme poverty and preventable disease around the world. HAF leaders have been reaching out to temples and Hindu spiritual centers throughout the United States to encourage their participation in local community service activities under the ONE Seva banner.

One wonders what drives these young advocates to pursue the sometimes thankless task of safeguarding and nurturing Hinduism day after day, not infrequently in hostile or indifferent circumstances. Perhaps Suhag Shukla voices the feelings of the rest when she recalls her childhood in America at a time when Hinduism was unknown and unsung in the mainstream and almost a burden to bear, till she understood its greatness.

"As a mother, I don't want my two sons to have to wait that long for this realization," she says. "If we are in an environment where



**American impact:** HAF impacts issues as diverse as getting Congressional recognition of Diwali (above, a large Diwali celebration blocks a New York street); striking down a state-sponsored religious license plate (right); and advocating the religious rights of Hindu prisoners in US jails, including the right to a vegetarian diet (below)



Hinduism is understood and appreciated, thousands of second- and third-generation Hindu Americans can live and breathe in that one space from the very beginning. And that is what I believe HAF can do and is doing—that is, help create that environment where Hinduism is better understood and a Hindu voice is heard."

For Mihir Meghani, a HAF cofounder, its success is immensely rewarding. "It serves and furthers global understanding by being an effective, professional, and credible voice for Hinduism and Hindu-Americans while working with some of the most passionate and dedicated young Hindu-Americans.

For me, a dynamic Hinduism is extremely important because I see more potential for Hinduism to serve as a carrier of inclusiveness, tolerance, pluralism and understanding globally."

Assem Shukla adds this thoughtful point: "As Hindu Americans, we must work tirelessly to expose others to our story, our way of life, our proven pluralistic traditions. That is why I hope HAF helps convince some Indian Americans that being a proud Hindu and an American is critically important to maintaining not only our way of life, but the pluralistic traditions of America itself."

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# My Encounter With a Divine Bovine

Basava, a temple's Zebu ox, blesses, advises, appoints, scolds and judges



COURTESY KALABHAIRAVA TEMPLE

BY CHOODIE SHIVARAM, BENGALURU

**T**HE TEMPLE OF KALABHAIRAVA IN CHIKKA Arasinakere shot into fame following a televised report on Basava, the temple's remarkable ox. The ancient village is located near the town of Maddur, 80 km from Bengaluru (as Bangalore has been renamed) on the road to Mysore. Previously known only for its fried Maddur *vada* snacks, the town now attracts thousands of visitors a day who seek the blessings of the sacred bull.

For generations, the Kalabhairava temple at Chikka Arasinakere has owned and worshiped a succession of Basavas (*basava* is the Kannada word for *ox*). The tradition of maintaining and worshiping a temple ox is common practice in many Siva temples.

"This is the fifth Basava I have seen in my lifetime," said Jogi Gowda, the village president. The fourth, he explained, showed some unusual abilities, but nothing like the present Zebu ox whose mystical powers were recognized when he reclaimed the temple's original lands which had gradually been usurped. "We appealed to the people to vacate the illegal occupancy, but to no avail," recounts Nagaraj, an ardent devotee of Basava. Then one day Basava served notice on the encroachers by circling the temple in a route which accurately encompassed all the temple's rightful land. Thereafter, he laid siege at each encroacher's doorstep and refused to leave until they pleaded for mercy and promised to vacate the land.

"We were spellbound by his knowing the temple's boundaries according to ancient land records. And Basava kept after each encroacher until they relented. What we mortals and the modern justice system couldn't achieve in years, Basava achieved in a jiffy," chuckled Nagaraj. "Theft, cheating and squabbles have overall been considerably reduced in the village. People respect and fear Basava—he's like a policeman."

"Basava alleviates the problems of those who seek his benevolence and renders justice to those faulted," says Thimme Gowda, from the neighboring village.

If anyone breaches a promise, Basava chases and pins them in a corner. He will not let go till they own up and vow to make amends. "Basava nudges the wrongdoer with his horns, intimidates them, but has never harmed anyone. Many a time he has chased a liar and held him captive until the liar uttered the truth," avers Nagaraj.

"It doesn't mean Basava corners and punishes just anyone, as we have all made mistakes. But if someone has forgotten his vow to a temple or Deity, or has stolen or embezzled the temple funds, Basava takes him to task," explains Reddy, a prosperous devotee from Bengaluru.

During this journalist's visit to meet the famous ox, I found him to be not fierce at



COURTESY KALABHAIRAVA TEMPLE

**An honored ox:** (clockwise from left) a donation-laden Basava at his temple stable; the Kalabhairava temple at Chikka Arasinakere; Basava at the Lord Kalabhairava temple dedicated by Sri Balagan-gadharanatha Swami in 2008

all. On the contrary, he seems quite gentle. The Zebu breed, believed to be the first domesticated cattle, are naturally docile. I saw devotees place infants at his feet. Basava lovingly caressed and played with them. There was not a trace of fear either in the child or the parents. The parents believe that, once blessed by Basava, the child is divinely insured.

Basava's caretaker, Jogappa, 28, told me, "Last year, the distressed parents of a six-month-old baby suffering from a heart ailment brought the child to Basava after the doctors had given up hope. They sought Basava's blessings by placing the child at his feet. Basava thoughtfully stood across the baby for a while and then carefully stepped over it. Miraculously, the child regained health. Such cases of miraculous healing are numerous."

Jogappa claims he owes his life to Basava. "We were crossing a river. Suddenly there was a flash flood. I was drowning. Appearing

out of nowhere, Basava swam through the overflowing river and shoved me to safety. He saved me. Since then, I have dedicated myself to his service."

Each day hundreds of devotees pack the Kalabhairava temple. They seek atonement for sins, curing of an illness or divine protection. When Basava performs his daily three *pradakshina* (circumambulations) around

the temple, many wait in line to touch him; others lie on the ground in his path with their head toward the temple Deity. Basava carefully places his hoof between the devotees and deftly walks over them.

I met Basava at Nagaraj's house in Bengaluru late in the evening, when I arrived in town with my family (including son Skanda, who wrote the sidebar next page). Basava



HINDUISM TODAY





was housed in the family's living room. Hay had been liberally spread on the floor. After a few minutes, Basava lay down, signaling the end of our darshan session. We watched him slowly fall asleep and finally snore as a few ladies sang a folk lullaby. As I was leaving, satisfied that I had my story, Jogappa, the caretaker, came to the car saying, "Basava indicates he wants you to come back again in the morning." The following day being a working day, the prospect of ploughing back through 18 kms of Bengaluru traffic was not attractive, and I indicated as much, but Jogappa insisted.

At 6:30 the next morning, the house was already teeming with devotees and curious visitors. We watched as Basava walked over a row of devotees waiting to be blessed. He was then given a warm bath and serenaded with a folk song. Then the puja was performed to him. Now he was ready to give more blessings.

People kneeled with outstretched palms at Basava's feet. He refused to bless one lady,



COURTESY KALABHAIRAVA TEMPLE

no matter how much she pleaded. He got increasingly annoyed as she persisted. I was apprehensive as our turn neared, and stories of his fierce horn nudges emerged from my

memory. "Don't look at him as an animal. Approach with devotion, seeing God in him," someone counseled. I mustered my courage—and sent my husband first! Unfazed,



**The ox trot:** Basava threads his way across devotees seeking his blessing, but he won't step over those he deems unworthy

he looked into Basava's eyes, softly chanted prayers, kneeled and spread his palms out. Basava quickly raised his hoof and gently placed it in his hands! Then each of us, taking turns, sought and received Basava's blessings in the same way.

I saw devotees offering lemons at Basava's feet, so I gave some to Nagaraj to be blessed. Basava refused. Nagaraj pleaded repeatedly but the bull angrily nudged him out. Exasperated, Nagaraj told me I must seek the blessings directly. I sat in front of the bull and prayed. He took the lemons aside, caressed them with his right hoof then pushed them towards me. He had sent a clear message—Divinity needs no intermediaries!


Basava, now eleven years old, was purchased by the Kalabhairava Temple at the cattle fair nine years ago, right after his predecessor died. Reddy recounts, "His owner

initially refused to sell Basava and offered other bulls instead. But we felt this bull had all the spiritual indicators. We kept a trishula near him for vibrations; we looked for a snake's head on his forehead and other significant characteristics, as directed by the elders. We persisted, and finally the owner agreed. We bought him for US\$180."

Village leaders and elders run the temple according to Basava's instructions. No activity is done without his consent. "We wanted to build a dining hall and had chosen a place. But Basava led us to a different place and indicated the building should be there. He even inspects the construction work." Basava insists that the temple premises be kept clean. He grunts if there is trash lying around and charges at anyone he finds dirtying the place.

As you can see from the photos, Basava receives lots of money—thousands or tens of thousands of rupees a day are tied to his head. He himself decides what to do with the money—it either goes to his temple or to a temple he visits. There is increasing de-

mand for him to visit surrounding villages and cities. "We receive requests from devotees in other places who are eager to receive his grace," Reddy tells us. "At times Basava himself chooses to visit a certain temple, village or home." Basava seems especially drawn to temples in need of repair or improvement. By standing close to the contribution box, he indicates that the money he carries should be given to that temple." In February, 2008, he was a guest of honor for the three-day dedication of the huge Lord Kalabhairava Temple at Adichunchanagiri Hills in Karnataka. Our editor spent two hours with him during the rituals.

The village of Chikka Arasinakere abounds in tales of Basava's marvels. He is their boon giver, their moral police and justice dispenser. His word is the holy verdict no one dares discount. Personally, my family and I experienced the power of his blessings. Call it faith, belief or divinity; no one can dispute the powers of this holy bull. Basava is an experience. 



1



2



3



4

PHOTOS: SKANDA PRASAD



5



6



7

## How Basava Selected a New Priest

BY SKANDA PRASAD, BENGALURU

IT WAS AFTERNOON WHEN WE REACHED the Kalabhairava Temple at Chikka Arasinakere village situated next to the Shimsha River. Entering the temple, we first paid our obeisance to Basava, who was resting in a small pen. Basava rose and began walking around the temple prakara. People were lying down in his path waiting for him to walk across them. I was initially scared, but then lay down, and Basava walked over me.

Outside the temple, a gaggle of brightly attired and exuberant people waited, their foreheads adorned with sandalwood paste and vermilion. We learned that they were from the surrounding villages, gathered to witness a momentous event. The nearby

temple of the village Goddesses Manchamma and Mariamma had fallen into disuse, and the temple administrators had sought Basava's help in choosing a suitable priest. Basava has chosen priests for other temples as well.

Elaborate ceremonies had been going on for two days. The temple's *utsava murthis* (parade Deities) were cleansed, and a purification ritual was performed to re-energize the edifice. Yagnas were performed. Now it was time for the choosing of the priest. Villagers from all surrounding villages had arrived, heeding Basava's call—anyone among them could be selected as the priest, irrespective of age, caste or even religion.

"If the priest determined by Basava is not among those assembled, he will go in search

of him. If that person is far away, Basava will wait for him to return to the village to anoint him. A month before, Basava had climbed on the rooftop of a house to choose as priest for another temple a 12-year-old boy who was playing there," says Jogi Gowda, one of the temple trustees.

1 As we follow Basava outside the temple, there is sudden silence (see photo 1 from my cellphone in the above sequence of events). The late afternoon sun is searing, and the asphalt is like burning coal. But no one in the barefoot crowd seems bothered. 2 The excitement is heightened by the temple drummers. 3 Basava sets out from the temple and walks to the riverside ghat, where some of the hopefuls are standing. As he rushes forward, it is clear that he has found the

**A priest is chosen:** The article below describes this numbered series of photos

new priest. Basava charges towards a young man and the visibly bewildered youth is herded towards the riverside by the ecstatic villagers. He is 20-year-old Basavesha, a farm laborer from Chikka village. As Basava pushes him into the river, cries of joy erupt from the thronging crowd—many of them are precariously balanced on the river bund, me included. Basava's push is so strong that others standing nearby fall into the water.

Immediately, Basavesha goes into a trance. 4 Emerging from the river, he walks beside Basava, both intuitively heading to the same destination. The crowd follows. No one is sure where they are going—some say they are going to the temple, some say they are going to another village. I follow close behind trying to keep pace. The crowd is so large that the only way I can get a clear view is from the river itself. Soon I'm waist deep in the water trying to get clear pictures. 5 As we watch, Basavesha is again pushed into the river by Basava. People hold on to

prevent the youth from going into deeper waters.

With this water ritual completed, the duo walk back to the first riverside ghat. This time, Basavesha leads the way. 6 Then, as his first act as the new priest, Basavesha performs *arati* to the *utsava murtis* of the two Goddesses. Basava now leads him to the Kalabhairava Temple, where they circumambulate the temple and seek the blessings of Kalabhairava.

Still in a trance, Basavesha is led outside the temple, where the festivities continue. Basava returns to his enclosure to bless the waiting crowd of devotees. The first to seek his blessings are the temple administrators of the Manchamma-Maramma temple, who seek Basava's approval of the ceremony and the decision, and request him to bless their temple.

Before we leave, my father and I go back to Basava to seek his feet in blessing. 7 Gently he places his hoof into our outstretched

palms. I feel graced, since Basava either crosses a devotee or offers his foot, but seldom both on the same day.

As we leave, I feel a surge of energy and profound spirituality. When we went to the temple that day, it was just to seek the blessings of Basava. Little did we know that such a great event was taking place. Witnessing such a Godly spectacle was itself a blessing.



Skanda Prasad, 20, is an undergraduate in electronics and communication engineering and has had a distinguished academic career. He has studied Hinduism and Sanskrit chanting since age 9 and loves Indian classical music. Skanda's e-mail is [skandaprasadn@gmail.com](mailto:skandaprasadn@gmail.com).





## VEGETARIANISM

# An Ethical Diet for Peace and Plenty

Good health, spirituality, sound ethics, balanced ecology and favorable economics are among the reasons a plant-based diet beats meat-eating today

BY R.P. JAIN

*This editorial is drawn from a talk given by the author during the Gandhi Peace Panel lectures on October 2, 2008, at the Eastern Connecticut State University, Willimantic, Connecticut, USA.*

IN INDIA, THE LAND OF AHIMSA, OR NONVIOLENCE, PEOPLE HAVE traditionally been vegetarian. Hailing from a family of staunch vegetarians, I consider myself fortunate to be living in harmony with the principles of nature. As a Jain follower, I strongly advocate a vegetarian diet, which I find superior not only from a moral stance, but also from the health and culinary points of view. Guests at our home, coming from both vegetarian and nonvegetarian backgrounds, are always overwhelmed with what they describe as the unbelievable taste and richness of our vegetarian cuisine.

Sadly, in recent times many Hindus, Jains and Buddhists, especially of the younger generation, are no longer so strict about our precepts and have taken to nonvegetarian food, mostly following the misconception that meat-eating is healthy. Truth be told, a vegetarian diet is actually much healthier than one based on animal protein. It is argued that there is a lot of protein in meat and eggs, but we do not need so much concentrated protein in our diet. There is plenty of protein in nuts, seeds, pulses and dairy products, which are also far easier to digest. Vegetarianism supports mental and physical health as well as spiritual cultivation. Fruits, vegetables, pulses, nuts and milk products provide a balanced diet which does not

make our system toxic. This is primarily because when an animal is killed, it becomes dead matter. In the case of many vegetables, if we eat part of the vegetable and re-plant another part, it can grow again; it is still a living organism.

It is a healthy sign that more and more people in the US, UK, Europe and other parts of the world are taking to a vegetarian diet in modern times, chiefly due to health reasons. There is a growing acceptance in the West that vegetarianism connotes a more positive

way of living than flesh eating. In India, the pilgrimage destination of Haridwar still enjoys the status of being a vegetarian city. Even in Japan, known to be virtually 100 percent nonvegetarian, you can now find vegetarian restaurants.

My friend Martin Gluckman, who runs the Vedic Society and teaches organic and ayurvedic cooking in South Africa, hails Indian vegetarianism thusly: "India has the world's greatest cuisine and most variety of dishes, boasting to its amazing cultural and spiritual heritage. It has a time-tested vegetarian cuisine offering a delight for all senses and the heart. India can be proud to have the world's largest per-capita number of vegetarians (I have read reports of more than 40%). No other country can make such a statement of humanity and nonviolence. The vegetarian culture and lifestyle is India's

**Cornucopia:** Ladies vend fresh vegetables at a market in Pushkar, Rajasthan; (above) a few of the many spices that make Indian food so distinctive and delicious



greatest achievement and gift to the world. Only in years to come will the true value of this gift be known."

It is important that we remain vegetarian not only for our health and nutrition, but from the points of view of spirituality, compassion, ethics, ecology and economics as well.

When we see the end product of meat in the supermarket or leather in the shoe store, there is a long chain of violence that created it. These products endorse and perpetuate violence in our society, which contributes to the terrorism that is rampant across the world. Eating habits reflect upon a human being's thoughts, speech and behavior. A nonvegetarian diet makes one prone to violence.

By moving away from food of violence we can move rapidly toward world peace. Albert Einstein averred, "It is my view that the vegetarian manner of living, by its purely physical effect on human temperament, would most beneficially influence the lot of mankind." When a helpless animal is killed by a deliberate act of violence, it dies in great dread. Its body is flush with hormones produced by fear. These toxic substances enter the body of the person who eats the flesh and adversely affect his or her body and mind. I have always wondered, how can the carcass of an animal that died in mortal fear give good health and refined, spiritual inclinations to its consumer?

Additionally, meat production is one of the most environmentally damaging industries in terms of pollution and inefficient use of agricultural land. According to a 2006 report from the United Nations Food & Agriculture Organization, livestock production is responsible for more greenhouse gasses than all the motor vehicles in the world, plus it severely degrades land and water.

It is also necessary to remove the myth and argument that vegetarians will not get enough food if nonvegetarians do not eat meat. This is a fallacy. It has been conclusively proven that more people can be sustained on vegetarian food than a diet based on meat. Livestock occupy over 30 percent of our planet's land surface, and 33 percent of global arable land is used to grow their feed, pointing to why a meat-based diet requires seven times more land than a plant-based diet. Thus, one of the easiest ways to help restore our environment and feed more people is to stop raising and killing animals for human consumption. We have no right to take the life of an animal when we cannot give it.

Economically, a vegetarian diet is preferable to a nonvegetarian diet. The same energy one can get from meat and eggs one can get from pulses and cereals. It actually costs three or four times as much money to produce an equivalent amount of calories from animal sources as from vegetable sources.

Some people may worry that self-control and too much care about nature would hamper development and bring about poverty. We know too well, however, that the more we consume, the more expensive things become, leading to the growth of the destitute class. Reckless commercial development also results in economic and social crises, bringing further suffering to the poor. Ahimsa, or nonharm, does not deny economic development; it only exercises self-control, limits our desires. Desires are endless. More and more desires give rise to materialism and extraordinary greed, far beyond basic human needs and sustainable consumption.

Greed results in the destruction of the very roots of our life. If we want to prevent the world from becoming a barren desert and our societies from growing into monstrous systems of injustice and suffering, self-control and nonviolence appear as the only reasonable answer—not only for Jains, but for people of any creed. For any spiritual being, the destruction of life, be it in the air, the water or on the ground, is a sin. But even if you do not subscribe to this principle, you will agree that reckless destruction of life could eventually lead to mankind's own demise. Jainism is not the only Indian school advocating nonviolence and self-control as central principles. Buddhism and Hinduism equally preach them.



**Sustenance:** (top to bottom) Cows are vegetarian. They represent the animal kingdom to Hindus, deserving our care and respect; Indian vegetarian cuisine is abundant with tasty dishes, from this simple, spicy okra curry to the thick, hearty chick pea dal

R.P. Jain, left, is a director of Motilal Banarsidass, a celebrated publisher of spiritual and religious books in India. E-mail: [mlbd100@gmail.com](mailto:mlbd100@gmail.com).





**Animals may soon be fuel for trucks:** Today this trucker in Minneapolis fills his tank with plant-based bio-diesel made from soy or palm oil. But it may not be long before his fuel includes fats from Tyson Foods' chickens, cows and pigs raised on factory farms. He may never know the difference.

## ENERGY & NONVIOLENCE

# Animal Fat to Become Synthetic Fuel

## The world's largest producer of meat is gearing up to make "Synfuel"

IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, LIQUID BIOFUELS have risen from obscurity to prominence as alternative energy sources. Most people are familiar with ethanol made from corn or sugarcane, or biodiesel from soy or palm oil. On a smaller scale, companies are making biodiesel from restaurant waste vegetable oils. This fuel source bypasses the issue of growing fuel crops on land that could be used to grow food, so is generally seen as a good thing. However, unknown to most, plans are underway to utilize waste fat from slaughterhouses and factory farms, the benefits of which are unclear to most and ethically offensive to some.

The statistics are grim. Each year in the United States alone some 8.8 billion animals are slaughtered for meat, nearly 30 animals for every man, woman and child. The vast majority are chickens. It is the low-grade fat from this industry that biofuel producers want to turn into a renewable biodiesel they are calling "synthetic diesel" or "Synfuel." Though the refining processes for animal fats and plant oils differ, the final fuels will all run diesel engines, and users won't know the source.

A new fuel plant being built by Dynamic Fuels (a joint venture between Tyson Foods and Syntroleum Corporation) could change

the face of animal fat fuel production from a smattering of small local efforts to an international industry.

### A new biofuel plant in Louisiana

In January Dynamic Fuels began construction of a large new biofuel production facility in Geismar, Louisiana, scheduled for completion in 2010. When fully operational, it is forecast to produce 75 million gallons of fuel per year. It is the first of more plants to come. The market need is prodigious. US consumption of diesel is 168 million gallons per day.

Costs for the plant are expected to run to \$138 million. Approximately \$100 million is being sourced in the form of tax-exempt Gulf Opportunity Bonds. The balance consists of equally proportioned cash commitments from Tyson Foods and Syntroleum. Like all biofuel production in the US, a combination of federal subsidies and biofuel mandates will enable it to compete with fossil fuels at current oil prices.

According to a press release at the start of construction, the Dynamic Fuels plant will "primarily use non-food-grade animal products produced and procured by Tyson Foods, such as beef tallow, pork lard, chicken fat and greases." The company notes that it has chosen these feedstocks because they

are typically priced lower than vegetable oils and do not impact the human food supply.

The exact proportion of fats from different animals to be used in the feedstock (called "Tyson Fat Blend" in Dynamic Fuels' literature for investors) is likely to vary based upon availability. Tyson has indicated that it will glean these from "all available sources inside and outside Tyson," depending upon where the lowest priced fats can be obtained.

Based on statements regarding requirements by Jeff Webster—Group Vice President of Tyson Foods' Renewable Products Group—if the Geismar facility used only chicken fat, for example, approximately 575 million pounds of fat would be needed to meet its quota of 75 million gallons of fuel per year. This is about one quarter of Tyson Foods' total annual chicken fat production.

Unlike plant-sourced biodiesel, Synfuel, expected to come online in 2010, will be mixable with the ordinary fuel supply for distribution. At the time of this writing, a Syntroleum spokesman, Ron Stinebaugh, said that they were currently looking at various distributors for this fuel, but had not made a final decision on the matter.

Synfuel also meets the high standards required for jet engines. In an interview about a year ago with the green technology blog



COURTESY COMPASSION OVER KILLING; HTTP://WWW.COK.NET



Cleantech, Webster indicated that the proximity to Barksdale Air Force Base and its three squadrons of B-52 bombers (the first Air Force jet certified to fly on synthetic fuel) was among the factors influencing building in Geismar.

William Anderson, an assistant Air Force secretary told *Environmental Leader* that the Air Force hopes its entire fleet will be able to fly on a 50-50 mix of domestically produced synthetic and petroleum-based fuels. Considering that in 2006 the Air Force spent more than \$5.7 billion on some 2.6 billion gallons of aviation fuel, there is great financial incentive for any company to find a way to supply even part of that demand. Syntroleum delivered 500 gallons of "renewable" Synfuel for testing in Air Force jets in late 2008.

The Dynamic Fuels partnership isn't the only avenue Tyson Foods Renewable Products Group is exploring. Tyson has also partnered with ConocoPhillips to investigate using a different chemical procedure for turning animal fats into a fuel that can also be mixed with conventional diesel. According to Tyson's publicity materials, this fuel will be targeted for distribution throughout the US as part of the normal on-road and farm diesel fuel supply.

### The lesser of two evils?

Environmentalists are divided over fat fuels. Pragmatists hold that though factory farming is ecologically unsound, it is unlikely to be stopped soon. So why not use the tre-



**Chickens to Bombers:** The Tyson/Syntroleum plant in Geismar is just 300 miles from the US B-52 Bomber fleet at Barksdale Air Force Base. B-52 bombers are certified to use the new fuel. Projecting a green energy image, Syntroleum euphemistically calls animal fats "renewable sources."

mendous volume of animal waste fat to create fuels that can substitute for petroleum-based fuels? This may not be ideal, but if it results in lower greenhouse gas emissions as well as decreased dependence on imported fuel, then it's not a bad use for a waste product. It is the lesser of two evils. Factory farming may be bad, but the effects of unchecked global warming will be even worse.

Opponents retort that though such fuels could offset a portion of petroleum-based fuel, the harm caused (both to the environment as a whole and the animals themselves) in producing them outweighs any benefit. Furthermore, as the global meat industry is currently responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than the whole of the transport sector, any claims about animal-based biofuels being lower in carbon emissions are immediately suspect, if the entire life-cycle of the fuel is taken into account.

### The consumer won't know

From the perspective of the consumer, the

first question that arises is how will one know if the fuel being pumped into their vehicle is made from animal products?

At this stage Dynamic Fuels' Synfuel seems targeted for the military and not commercial airlines, so your passenger jet will not likely be using it. But since the synthetic diesel produced in Geismar can be mixed with conventional diesel, you could soon be using animal-based fuel in your diesel car or truck without even knowing it.

Tyson touts it as a genuine advantage over normal biodiesel that consumers will be unable to tell the difference between its diesel fuels and those made with petroleum. However, for thoughtful people who oppose factory farming on ethical or environmental grounds this ambiguity creates a serious problem of accountability that is not easily resolved.

By Matthew McDermott,  
senior writer for [treehugger.com](http://treehugger.com)  
and [planetgreen.com](http://planetgreen.com)

## Voices from Hindus, a Vegan and the Vedas



**Vijai Singhal, Secretary, Hindu Council of Australia:** Using animal fats as biofuel is simply preposterous. Animal farming is one of the largest polluters of the environment. The number of land animals

killed for food worldwide in 2006 was a mind-boggling 56 billion. That does not include fish and other marine animals. Livestock grazing and animal feed crops account for 70% of all agricultural land and 30% of the land surface of the planet. Reduction of meat consumption is the most economical and direct method of tackling the climate change problem. Cruel and useless exploitation of animals merely for the gratification of human appetite is what Hindu morality stands against.

**Abhinav Dwivedi:** The whole envi-

ronmental debate needs a paradigm shift to gain momentum. If ethics can dominate economics, then these issues will be viewed differently. People will ask questions: Why do we have these by-products? What is the existential necessity of raising and slaughtering animals in huge quantities for human consumption?



**Matt Prescott, Director of Corporate Affairs for PETA:** A recent report published by the United Nations concludes that the meat industry is responsible for more global warming emissions than

all the cars, trucks and planes in the world combined. Clearly, the answer to global warming isn't to fill gas guzzling cars with ground up remains of tortured animals. It is to go vegetarian, which is something every

person can afford to do and should do for the sake of their own health, animals and the environment.

**Venkatakrishna Sastry:** This is an issue for all Hindus. It touches on the key principle of dharma, *ahimsa* (nonviolence), on the positive side, and fighting *lobha* (market greed) on the other. The same logic used for sattvic, non-animal derived products such as soap, cooking oil, cosmetics, etc., holds good for bio-fuels derived from animal fats.

**Panshula Ganesan:** Buying a product is a form of voting. Knowingly buying a biofuel that has been derived wholly or in part from slaughtered animals is to vote yes to a hurtful chain of events, of raising and slaughtering animals in huge quantities for human consumption.

**Yajur Veda 12.32.90:** You must not use your God-given body for killing God's creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever.



# The Power of Affirmation

How to Impress Your Subconscious Mind with Positive Statements to Mold Your Future

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIASWAMI



**T**HE POWER OF AFFIRMATION changes and remolds the putty-like substance that makes up the subconscious areas of the mind. For years we have repeated sayings and statements, attached meaning to them in our thoughts and through listening to ourselves speak. This has helped form our life as we know it today, for the subconscious brings into manifestation the impressions we put into it. Therefore, to change the subconscious pattern and increase its vibration, we must remold with new ideas and new concepts its magnetic forces. This can be done through the power of affirmation. Below is an example.

I let go of the  
past. I let go of  
the future. I am a  
being right now.

S. RAJAM

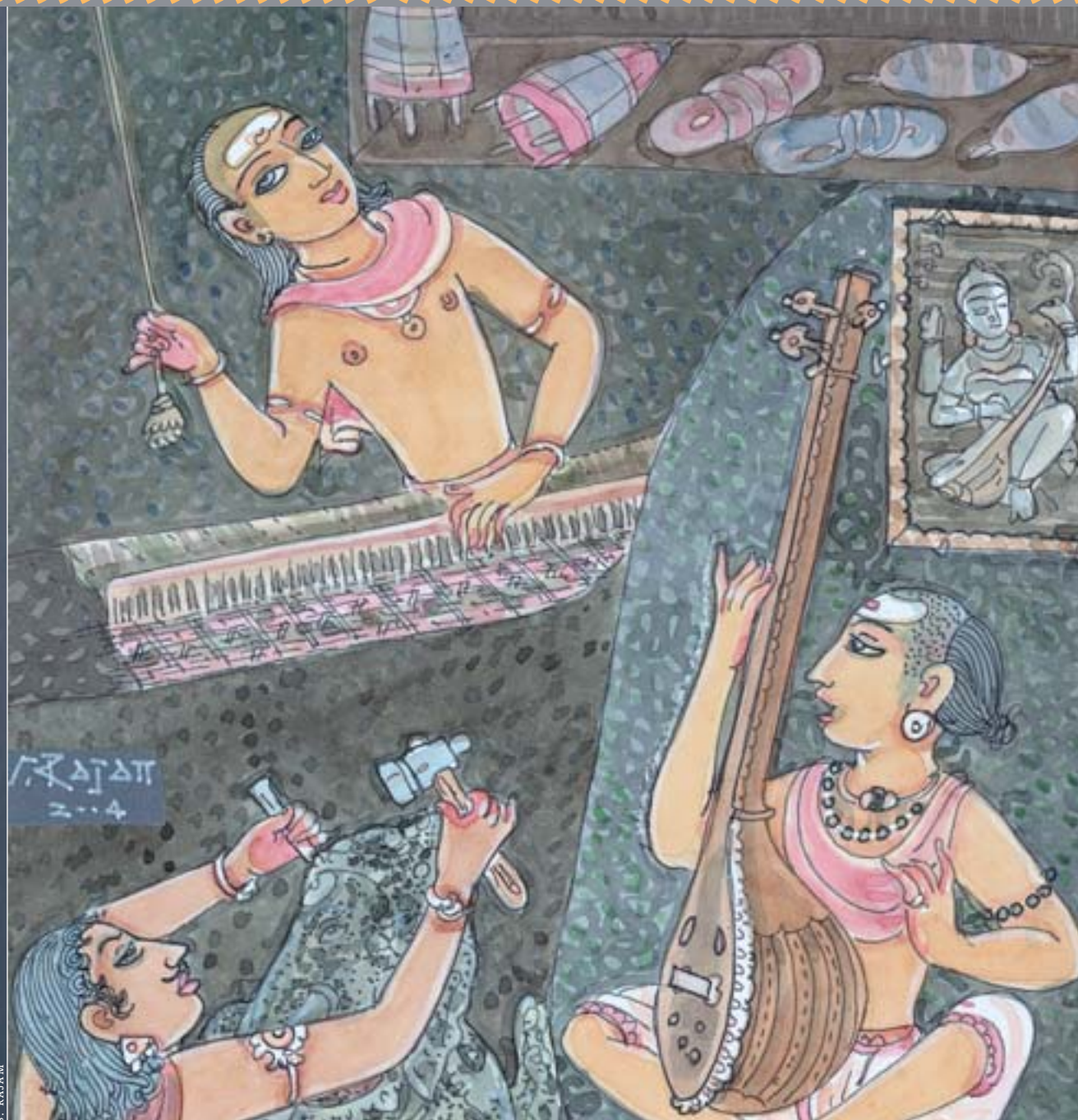


## Introduction

by Satguru  
Bodhinatha Veylanswami



EVERY THOUGHTFUL PERSON HAS OBSERVED that the one constant we can always count on in life is change. Nothing ever stays the same. There are always surprises. As individuals, we, too, are constantly changing. The key to making progress, lifetime after lifetime, is to keep changing for the better, overcoming complacency and unwanted habit patterns and thus improving our character. My Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, observed, "The subconscious has a natural tendency to resist change. It is slow to realize that life is constant change. That is why it is so easy to fall into a rut. It requires a daring, spirited nature to call forth unused resources, to step out of the routine into a fuller and freer life." For this, affirmations can be a dynamic tool. The idea behind affirmations is that through the repetition of positive statements we can make greater progress on the spiritual path and increase our magnetism to success. To progress spiritually, a positive self-concept is essential. What is a positive self-concept? It is thinking of oneself as a worthy individual deserving of a wonderful life and fully capable of achieving it. Unfortunately, many of us reach adulthood with a negative self-concept, feeling that others are better than we are, and that life has little to offer. A negative self-concept develops when, while growing up, we are criticized constantly or cruelly by our parents and teachers. Having a positive concept about our outer self allows us to identify with our inner, spiritual nature so that we truly feel we are a divine being. Let's look for a moment at changing our self-concept from a negative one to a positive one. Just as we can strengthen the body through exercise and become fit, we can also remold the subconscious mind and change its composition through the power of affirmation. ¶ For many years, as part of our pre-dawn worship, the monastery has repeated an affirmation. We recite it aloud together. It has been effective in reminding all the monastics of our spiritual purposes and the importance of integrating the blessings of the Deities into our everyday affairs. A few years ago we developed a similar affirmation for families to repeat together every morning. We include it on page 50 with the suggestion that you and your family recite it together each day. ¶ Remember, success with affirmations depends upon utilizing the three-fold key—think about the meaning, create a visualization for this meaning and feel how you will feel when the hoped-for goal is consistently happening in your life. We hope this exploration of the power of affirmations changes your life as much as it has transformed ours.



S. RAJAM

**I can. I will.  
I am able to  
accomplish  
what I plan.**

## The Power of Affirmation

From the Teachings of Satguru  
Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

AFFIRMATION, WHEN USED IN WISDOM for spiritual reasons, is a power, and should be understood through meditation. Before beginning to work with an affirmation, we must understand completely from within what we are doing, being sure that when our subconscious has been remolded we can take the added responsibilities, the new adventures and challenges that will manifest as a result of breaking out of one force field and entering into another. Only then should we proceed. ¶ An affirmation is a series of positive words repeated time and time again in line with a visual concept. Such a statement can be repeated mentally or, preferably, verbally. Words in themselves, without a pictorial understanding, make a very poor affirmation. To choose the affirmation best suited to our needs, first we must realize what we do not want, and then we must take steps to change it, in the very same way we would discriminate in letting go of our possessions in order to purchase new ones. Whether one is dealing with home and possessions, thoughts and concepts, self-created inhibitions or blocks and barriers of the subconscious, the principle is the same. If one feels, "I can't," he cannot. If he is always criticizing himself and lamenting over what he cannot do, then he has to reverse this pattern and change the flow of magnetic mental force, enliven its intensity by saying orally and feeling through all the pores of his body, "I can. I will. I am able to accomplish what I plan."





## BUILDING CONFIDENCE

In applying this tantra, begin by repeating the affirmation fifty or a hundred times a day. In watching your reactions, you may find that the subconscious will not accept these three statements, "I can. I will. I am able." You may still have feelings of "I can't. I won't. I am not able." This then begins a period to live through where the mind's magnetic forces fight with one another, in a sense. The aggressive forces of your nature are trying to take over and reprogram the passive ones that have been in charge for so many years. Of course, the aggressive forces will win if you will persist with your verbal and visual affirmation. You must not give up saying, "I can. I will. I am able," until you find the subconscious structure actually creating situations for you in which you can and are able to be successful, happy and acquire what you need, be it temporal goods or unfoldment on the inner path.

ART BY S. RAJAM



**I am the complete master of all my forces. My spiritual energies govern and control the force fields wherever I am for the highest good.**

**Through understanding, being pure, full of spirited life, I am filled and thrilled with unlimited power, now and forever.**

## CONTROLLING AWARENESS

I learn to concentrate the mind so that I can study, not from books but from observation, which is the first awakening of the soul.

The superconscious energies flood easily through me, bringing into my life an abundance of creativity, intuition, perception and bliss.



## FACING HARDSHIPS

I am equal to whatever challenge I meet.



# LIVING POSITIVELY

An affirmation can alter your life by creating mentally the patterns and moods of each day through which you will subsequently move. Here is one that can be used to dynamically begin each day. "I am now open to a flow of spiritual energy in which I perceive the most worthy course of action for this day. My service, being selfless, opens new doors of supply, making available all of the tools required so that my work will be beautiful, energetic and influential to the highest degree." The subconscious mind is like a piece of clay that can be impressed. These impressions go into the subconscious from the conscious mind and remain there vibrating until changed. The intuitive mind, which we call the superconscious, works through the subconscious when the channels of the subconscious are open. Hence, in impressing the subconscious mind, we must be very careful to create positive channels, and not to create a negative block. You can also write your own affirmation, but it must always be positive and carefully worded. ¶ You have perhaps often heard friends repeat the same complaint over and over again. They were not only making an affirmation, perhaps unknowingly, for their own subconscious mind, but for yours as well. Therefore, it behooves us always to be with positive people, spiritual, life-giving people, in order to be positive ourselves. ¶ It takes great courage to go from one force field of the mind to another, for this means tearing up long-accustomed patterns and facing a period of adjustment while new subconscious patterns are created. It all has to do with changing the subconscious patterns. This is a power. You can change the patterns of your mind yourself. Try it. It is not too difficult. ¶ Each day we make affirmations with our thoughts and our feelings—and the very words that we speak stabilize these patterns. But as the inner light begins to dawn its life-giving rays, a new, positive power comes into our words, our thoughts and the feelings that well up from the subconscious, making new manifest patterns in the force fields of the conscious world for us to meet and speedily experience.

ART BY S. RAJAM



**I am now open to a flow of spiritual energy in which I perceive the most worthy course of action for this day.**

**My service, being selfless, opens new doors of supply, making available all of the tools required so that my work will be beautiful, energetic and influential to the highest degree.**



## SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

I am not my body, mind or emotions. They are but shells of the infinite energy that flows through them all. I am this energy. I am its source.

## WILLPOWER

My willpower is an inexhaustible resource. The more willpower I use, the more I have to use.

## COMPASSION

I will help weeping ones to smile by smiling myself, even when it is difficult. I will radiate love and goodwill to others, that I may open a channel for God's love to come to all.

PARAMAHANSA  
YOGANANDA



## NURTURING BHAKTI

Devotion in Hinduism is known as bhakti. It is an entire realm of knowledge and practice unto itself, ranging from the child-like wonder of the unknown and the mysterious to the deep reverence which comes with understanding of the esoteric interworkings of the three worlds—our physical universe, the subtle or astral plane, and the world of the Gods. Here are two affirmations designed to cultivate bhakti.



ART BY S. RAJAM

### APPRECIATION

Appreciation is a beautiful, soulful quality available to me in every circumstance—being thankful for life's little treasures, grateful for the opportunity to begin the day where I am, appreciating the perfect place my karma and God's grace have brought me to.

**Siva is  
the Life  
of my life.**

**I affirm that the  
Gods are given to  
care for man on the  
planet and see us  
through our tenure  
on Earth, and that  
their decisions  
are vast in their  
implications.**

### THE POWER OF FEELING

The power of thought is very strong, but only strong for a short time. It is the power of feeling that awakens the knowing consciousness. For example, suppose we repeat an affirmation such as this: "All my needs will always be met." And we repeat it again, "All my needs will always be met." In the initial stating of this affirmation, we understand something about it. However, unless we gain a conscious mental picture of what the words mean, they mean little more than nothing, for they do not reach deep enough to make contact with the limitless powers of your inner self. ¶ Get into the rhythm of the affirmation. This causes strong feelings and impressions deep in the inner mind. Each word has a certain rate of vibration. Feeling is greater than visualization. Although each word of your affirmation may have a certain meaning to you intellectually, the rate of vibration of the word may not impress your mind in the exact same way in which you think it should to produce the result that you desire. An antidote to this is to use affirmations in this way. Repeat the affirmation, "All my needs will always be met," and feel how it is to feel after all of your needs have been met. Until you find this feeling, you should not expect the affirmation to work. Every time that you have a need and that need is met, a certain feeling is then produced in you. That same feeling you have to feel the very instant you speak the affirmation. You then open a channel that instant to your own intuition, through which all good comes. In this state of mind one has inspiration and will. It is from the intuition that, at the eleventh hour, fifty-ninth minute, fifty-ninth second, every need is met. ¶ The next time you have complete feelings from the innermost sources of your being that your every need will be met, quietly repeat that affirmation over again: "All my needs will always be met." Simultaneously think, visualize and feel deeply with an inner, all-encompassing knowing that each need will be met. This is the esoteric secret of making an affirmation work. ¶ People say affirmations work for them but sometimes they do not. Why do affirmations only work sometimes? It is because the subconscious is receiving the affirmation at a psychological moment, and a greater knowing, visualization and feeling has been awakened to some extent. However, at the times when an affirmation did not work, there was no knowing, no visualization or feeling attached to it. Just words. When affirmations are repeated over and over again without feeling or visualization, occasionally negative results are produced, as the vibrations of the words themselves may not register what is intended in the subconscious.



## ATTRACTING ABUNDANCE

This ancient tantra is often used in gaining the material things of life. Affirmations do work in this respect, maybe even a little better than in gaining spiritual awakening, because the material desires are often stronger. ¶If you need some material possession, and if it will do only good for yourself, your family and your friends, use the power of affirmation and see how quickly your need is manifested through one external channel or another. Distinguish carefully a material need from a desire. Desires are dangerous, because it is easy to manifest material desires, but it is not as easy to assume responsibility for what the fulfillment of the desire might entail. That is why people sometimes do attract to themselves material possessions through affirmations and suffer the complications produced in their lives. This happened because they did not understand the full responsibility of having the desired possessions. ¶An example of a material need is having sufficient money for necessities. Generate the feeling and the picture that you now have sufficient sums of money to meet every human need, but not necessarily every human desire; just the needs. Then practice this affirmation: "I will always have sufficient money to meet all my needs." Repeat it once. Now stop affirming. Remain quiet, know, visualize and then feel how it is to be open to a sufficient flow of money to meet your every need. Get that feeling! It is a secure feeling, not a flamboyant, reckless feeling, not a feeling that now you can go out and have a good time. No, this is a quiet, secure feeling, born of being in a judicious state of mind. ¶Let us look closely at this feeling again: "I will always have sufficient money to meet all my needs." Now resolve to hold yourself open to ways and means by which you will have money to meet your every need for yourself and for your family. Be open to ways in which you can better budget the money you now have. Live by the ethic, "Waste not, want not." Soon you will find that you begin to become secure within yourself as the vibrations of your verbal, visual feeling of this affirmation ring through you entirely. Today you will begin handling the funds you have more judiciously, and soon you will begin attracting abundance from unexpected creative sources. Be open to new ideas, new people, new opportunities, expectant and ready to handle the wealth you have proclaimed as yours.

**All my needs will always be met.**

**I will always have sufficient money to meet all my needs.**



### KEEPING HEALTHY

I keep strong and healthy by exercising at least one half hour each day through such activities as brisk walking, swimming, dancing, salutations to the sun, hatha yoga and vigorous work.

I know that a good diet is the best medicine. I eat in moderation. I drink two liters of water daily, minimize fried foods and avoid junk foods, white rice, white flour, processed sugar and degraded oils.

ART BY S. RAJAM



# MANAGING KARMA

How can we work out karma? First, we must know fully that we ourselves are the cause of all that happens. As long as we externalize the source of our successes and failures, we perpetuate the cycles of karma, good or bad. As long as we blame others for our problems or curse the seeming injustices of life, we will not find within ourselves the understanding of karmic laws that will transmute our unresolved patterns. We must realize that every moment in our life, every joy and every sorrow, can be traced to some source within us. There is no one “out there” making it all happen. We make it happen or not happen according to the actions we perform, the attitudes we hold and the thoughts we think. Therefore, by gaining conscious control of our thoughts and attitudes by right action, we can control the flow of karma. Karma, then, is our best spiritual teacher. We spiritually learn and grow as our actions return to us to be resolved and dissolved. Here are some affirmations designed to re-educate the subconscious mind about the events we face in life.

## I am the master of my fate.

### SAGELY ADVICE FOR A GOOD LIFE

*Hold a positive attitude, for expectations have a magnetic power. Develop right thinking, for thoughts are building blocks of life, forming our destiny. Stop complaining, start thanking. Stop criticizing, start appreciating. Learn to speak to your subconscious self, for it is the repository of tremendous powers. Contact the source of success—God—Who is closer to us than our parent, friend, sibling or spouse. Develop a healthy sense of humor, for laughter is an all-round tonic. Finally, never give up.*

DADA VASWANI

ART BY S. RAJAM



**I am grateful to others for playing back to me my previous actions so that I can see my mistakes and experience the same feelings I must have caused in others.**

**It is my resolve not to react to life's experiences, but to understand them.**

## DAILY FAMILY AFFIRMATION

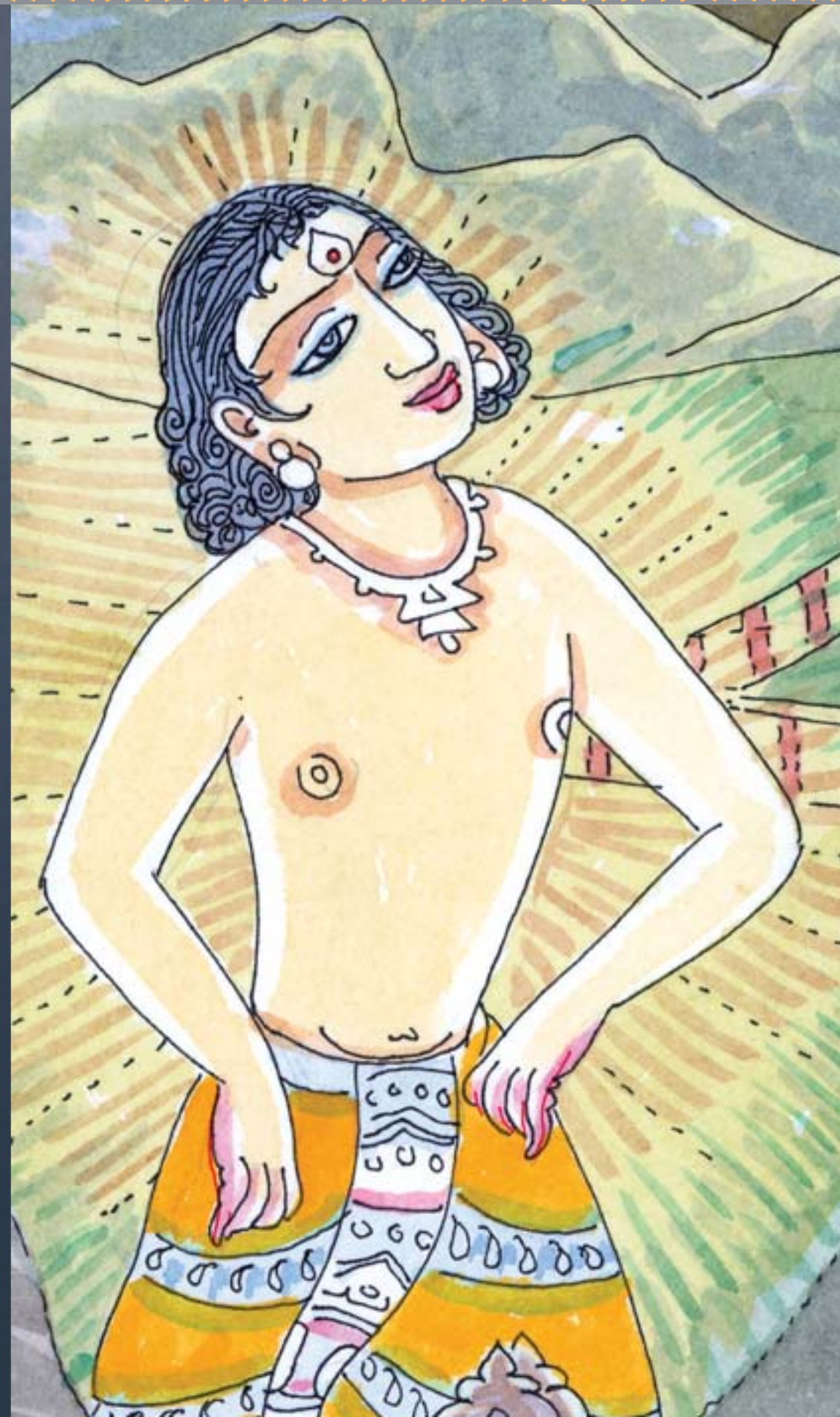
We, the (name) family, beseech the grace of Lord Ganesha to manifest His blessings of peace and harmony within our home and to joyfully fulfill the spiritual, social, economic, cultural and educational goals of family life as outlined in Hindu scripture. We dedicate ourselves, individually and together, to our daily worship, spiritual disciplines and study. Knowing that bonding is essential, we hold daily family meetings and weekly gatherings to cooperatively solve problems and create a loving, uplifting atmosphere in which each member develops discipline, responsibility and the spirit of divine service. We remain close-knit and cultivate unity by talking together about the experiences of our day and extend our affection and harmony to other families as well. We take time for training, and we value mistakes as opportunities to learn. To us, the guest is truly God, welcomed and honored with heartfelt hospitality. Through our thoughtfulness, care and compassion, we allow an abundance of gold to accumulate within our home. We give generously of our income and our time to further our religion. We are filled and thrilled with God's Cosmic Energy, creatively alive and in tune with the universe.



## LIVING IN THE NOW

There is really very little to be said intellectually about the eternal now. You have to live in it, and in living in it you discover a higher state of consciousness than you have experienced in your life. Because the vibration of the eternal now is so very high, part of your mind and nature does not like to experience the security of the eternal now, which is really the height of security. It takes practice to maintain a continued experience of the eternal now. Affirmations can help you live more and more in the now.

**I am satisfied with everything that I do. Drying a dish, cleaning a floor or painting a picture can be a work of art.**



**I'm all right, right now.**

**I remain in the present, right now—using the catalog of the experiences of the past as a planning book for my future.**



## TWELVE KEYS FOR SUCCESS WITH AFFIRMATIONS

1. Make your affirmations appropriate to the need.
2. Use them regularly.
3. Keep your list of affirmations handy.
4. Start your day with positive affirmations.
5. Make your affirmations straightforward and simple.
6. Use positive words only.
7. Mix strong, powerful and positive emotions with your affirmations.
8. Make your affirmations personal and in the first person.
9. Use affirmations that remind you of your goals.
10. Act as if your affirmations are already yielding positive results.
11. Add the positive energy of God or your higher self to your affirmations.
12. Add the power of visualization.

LIST BY JAYARAM V.  
WWW.HINDUWEBSITE.COM

ART BY S. RAJAM

## GURU BHAKTI

I know that God exists equally in all souls but is most apparent in the enlightened master. I revere my satguru as Siva Himself. He is like the sun, simply being, radiating his very pure energy like the sun evaporates water.





## OPINION

# The Colonized Mind

### Thoughts on colonialism, Christianity and the relinquishment of Hindu consciousness

BY MURALI BALAJI

WHEN I WROTE MY PREVIOUS ESSAY ("WHY WE ARE IL-literate," Oct/Nov/Dec, 2008), on the need for Hindu parents to become literate in our way of life in order to teach it to their children, I admit that I failed to interrogate the causes of why many Hindus have so little knowledge of Hindu philosophy and practice.

Much of what we know about Hinduism today was profoundly shaped by three major overlapping forces: colonialism, Christianity and capitalism. We as modern Hindus, whether we are in India or are diasporic children in distant lands, are products of colonial-era constructions of Hinduism. This, as scholars such as Homi Bhabha have noted, has been a major contributor to our collective illiteracy about our way of life, as British attempts to eliminate or obscure Vedic teachings were connected to the Crown's grand vision of making Indians into the ideal colonial subjects.

The power of colonialism is that it does not need force to achieve its aims. Rather, the British, and to a lesser degree the French, were able to commit symbolic violence on Hindu traditions. From Lord Macaulay's "Minutes on Indian Education," which became the standard of India's modern education system, to the work of Katherine Mayo, whose *Mother India* cast Hinduism as a demonic way of life, the colonizers reinforced the idea that Indians were inferior subjects.

While Indians mark the annual anniversary of India's physical emancipation from British rule, it's important to note that we have yet to mark our psychological emancipation from colonialism. We continue to be the ideal colonial subjects, inherently believing in the British standard of society as the one that India—and Hindus—needed to progress towards.

I think our ignorance of Hinduism has a lot to do with our allowing the British and other non-Hindus to write our texts for us. When I was in elementary and middle school, the textbook references to Hinduism always centered around three major arguments: that Hindus worship many Gods, the caste system is religiously sanctioned and oppresses lower castes, and that all Hindus worship the same way. I was so happy as a youngster to read even the mention of Hinduism in these texts that I never bothered to ask my parents if what I was reading was in any way accurate. Absorbing these obscure, biased ideas ultimately contributed to my illiteracy about Hinduism, as it did for many of my peers.

But this ignorance of Hinduism isn't just a burden my generation faces. As I began to ask more questions about Hinduism and the Vedantic way of life, I was surprised to find out that those in my parents' generation and the generation before them learned about Hinduism from their colonizers. This is why I believe Hinduism was profoundly impacted by colonialism and Christian missionary distortions. For instance, our education system, which is tasked with teaching Indian history and perhaps 5,000 years of literature, continues to mimic the British standard set by Macaulay. More tragically, beauty products such as hair straighteners and skin lightening



cream have reinforced the notion that whiteness is an ideal to be striven for. As we continue to idolize fairness, I'm reminded of postcolonial thinker Frantz Fanon's commentary on the tragic state of the colonized mind: we seek to shed ourselves of our native skin and occupy the skin of our colonizers, even as they continue to mock us and see us as their subjects.

This colonization of the Hindu mind began under British rule, but it has continued through the modern era in India, thanks in large part to the prevalence of missionary schools, which continue to be considered the best sources of education for Indian youth. Both of my parents spent at least part of their learning years in Christian schools, where all students, including non-Christians, attended morning mass or said morning prayers every day. I asked them if they ever learned anything about Hinduism in school. My mom just laughed. My late grandfather told me stories of how his poor friends had to convert to Christianity in order to get a free education.

My girlfriend, who was born in Guyana, told me how Hindus there held on to their beliefs as a form of resistance, subverting the colonial Christian authorities who had

brought them to foreign shores. Ironically, I have learned much more about Hindu practice from my Guyanese girlfriend than I ever did from the Tamil Brahmin community I was raised in. Perhaps this is because I grew up in an environment where Hinduism was assumed and often taken for granted, whereas for my girlfriend's family, Hinduism was a matter of survival.

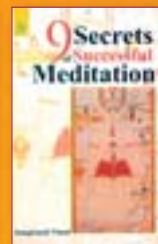
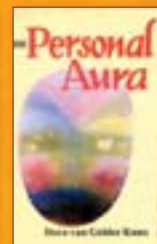
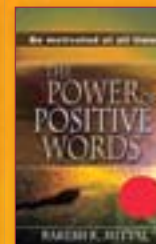
I don't see that same sense of urgency among many of my peers, and I blame that partly on the legacy of colonialism, which has perpetuated illiteracy and indifference about Hinduism long after India's break from the British Empire. As an anti-colonial scholar, I have linked my practice of Hinduism with my desire to emancipate myself from the slavishness of colonial-era thinking, which Fanon aptly called "internal inferiorization."

I've interacted with many Hindus, both immigrants and second-generation products alike, who aspire to be "Western" by disavowing their Hindu identity. It's as if disconnecting themselves from their roots somehow brings them closer to the myth of the melting pot. Tragically, some Hindu parents allow their children to become "American" or "British" by shedding their Hindu identity, as if being a Hindu was somehow a burden. A fellow Hindu journalist recently told me that a business owner she knows allowed his kids to convert to Christianity because it would make them more American.

Stories like this aren't isolated, sadly, and I fear that my generation is in danger of losing our way as a result of not knowing where we're from. More importantly, until we realize the colonization of our minds and seek to break away from it, we are doomed to not grasping the relevance of Hindu teachings to our daily lives.

While colonialism has had a lasting impact on the way many of us see—and misunderstand—Hinduism, we Hindus must shoulder an equal blame. After all, the ideological and economic structures of colonialism that have diluted our way of life could not have been so effective had many of us not submitted to them.

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## CULTURE

# The New Age Cycles Back to India

### A Western movement sparked by Hindu mysticism is embraced through books and magazines by some in the culture that gave it birth

THE "NEW AGE" IS A MOVEMENT THAT became popular in the West in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, it carried a clear Eastern pedigree, drawing from Hindu mysticism and Western occult teachings that appealed to the idealist counterculture then in the ascendancy. But over the course of the 80s and 90s, virtually all overt signs of Hinduism faded away. New Age authors, writing for a Christian and Jewish readership, retained popular Sanskrit words in their books, such as chakra, but with a nonspecific spiritual connection. Cut from its Eastern roots, the still popular New Age morphed from a quasi-religious movement to a loose spiritual philosophy with a strong marketing angle, aimed primarily at women, promoting health, beauty, inner peace and successful relationships.

Recently, decades after its blossoming in

the West and 8,000 miles away, the "New Age" has surfaced in India in the form of popular books, magazines and products. But in the process, someone forgot to tell the Indian journalists (who were writing for Hindu readers) that the "New Age" isn't supposed to be overtly Hindu. But this lapse has not stalled its popularity. HINDUISM TODAY dispatched its correspondents to investigate the nature of India's New Age mystical, cultural phenomenon which journeyed India to the West and back to India again.

#### In India, It's Just Hinduism

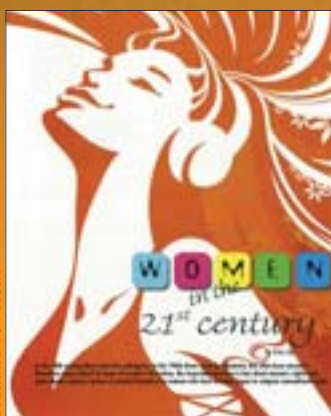
Priyanka Malhotra, director of Full Circle Books, tells us, "The term *New Age* was coined in the US, and there people connect it to the hippie culture, or to magic. But it's actually about peace, love and understanding. Over the years, people misused and

misunderstood the term in the West." Priyanka's Delhi-based publishing house and bookstore chain specializes in what she calls the "body, mind, spirit" segment of the publishing trade. "If I have to define the concept of New Age in the Indian mind, it is anything that goes beyond the physical body, and anything alternative to the mainstream."

"Our books on yoga, meditation and finding inner peace do very well," Priyanka explains. "There is a wide demand for these from people who are looking for a life beyond materialism." Intent on also appealing to the five senses, her stores offer music, candles, incense, herbal food and natural drinks, as would a comparable store in San Francisco. Priyanka says that men and women are equally drawn to their products.

One of the most popular titles at Circle Books is *You Can Heal Your Life*. Another





**A sampling of India's New Age:** (above) Indian New Age magazines emphasize well-being, prosperity, empowerment and health. (opposite page, left) Advertisers announce seminars by popular Western authors; (right) New Age art illustrates a traditional Hindu subject.

top seller is *Mind the Gap*, which Priyanka tells us is about "bringing spirituality into daily life without renouncing the world and material possessions." The shelves are brimming with such guides on how spirituality can improve your personal life.

Swati Bhise, a customer at the Delhi store, comments: "It is good that in today's fast-paced life people can find spiritual books this easily, or audio books to listen to while

on the move. New Age books have made it very simple. If we need a particular mantra, for example, we can find it on a tape or in books that are easily understandable and not complicated." Swati sees no conflict between the New Age trend and her Hindu background. Hinduism, she explains, is an essential part of her profession. "I was the first disciple of Sonal Mansingh (a famous Odissi dancer). To be a dancer you have to have

knowledge of our ancient Hindu scriptures. You have to study sculpture and temple architecture; without this, you cannot learn the art of dancing."

Prakash Kumar, also here shopping for books, relates, "New Age books are an extension of Hinduism. It is clear when you read these books. I even feel it is good that New Age authors do not mention that their works are sourced from Hinduism. Otherwise their readership would be restricted. What I like the most is that they project the message in a simple way. Our traditional books are vast and difficult to digest."

## 9 Beliefs of the West's New Age Movement

The term New Age was coined to denote an awakening of the mass consciousness to deeper realities and the need for individual attunement with universal, higher consciousness and creative transformation. In practice, New-Age thinking embraces myriad enlightenment teachings, mostly of Eastern origin—from crystallography to Zen, parapsychology to holistic medicine. Below is a summary of its beliefs formulated by HINDUISM TODAY that reflect the movement in the 1970's U.S.

1. I believe in the one Eternal Source or Ultimate Reality, called by many names, which flows through all forms of nature and can be known through spiritual realization and experience.

2. I believe in unseen worlds and beings who may interact with our world, and that some are benevolent and help guide and protect us, while others are malevolent, and that channeling, or mediumship, is a means of contacting such souls.

3. I believe that the world is a dynamic, conscious entity; that mankind is but one part of the cosmic ecology and that, as stewards, we must treat the world responsibly, with love, respect and reverence.

4. I believe that consciousness is present in and conveyed through some structures more than others. Thus, for example, crystals are powerful sources or channels of knowledge and spiritual strength.

5. I believe in meditation, trance, rebirthing, self-healing, channeling, past-life regression, crystals, sexual tantras, drugs and more as effective tools in the quest for wholeness and oneness with the sacred, and that one should continue to explore alternatives and not feel restricted to the disciplines of any one system of thought.

6. I believe the world has entered the New Age, the age of Aquarius, awakening to the consciousness of love, selflessness, compassion and creativity, from the old age of hatred, war, ignorance and greed. Those who perceive this vision should share it with others to uplift society.

7. I believe that traditional religions are outmoded and that we are moving toward a universal brotherhood; yet, the Eastern religions and so-called primitive faiths are rich reservoirs of truth and spiritual practice.

8. I believe in nonconformity and non-



commitment: that each person is responsible to his or her own conscience only and not to the dictates of society which often unduly hamper freedom of expression, and that even spiritual gurus are to be approached with circumspection.

9. I believe that many of society's traditional economic and social structures are outmoded and should be abandoned for ones which reflect New Age consciousness, and that dropping out of society is a valid New Age alternative.

Abhishek Jain of Motilal Banarsidass, one of India's largest and most respected publishers, started a New Age line eight years ago. Abhishek, who now specializes in that niche, explains, "These are books to heal yourself, to study yourself. Chakras, yoga, meditation, Reiki, auras, self-healing and alternative therapies are some of the popular subjects. Tai Chi, Chinese medicine, *vastu* and parapsychology are also part of our New Age section. Our collection also includes titles on Hindu Gods and Goddesses, Sai Baba, Buddhism, Ramana Maharishi and Hindu philosophy." Describing a market that is just the opposite in the West, he says, "We even carry a few titles on Islamic mysticism, but no books on Christianity. Christians don't buy these books, only Hindus and Buddhists do." He notes that there is plenty of room for growth in this segment: "I can see increasing market possibilities in India and in the Southeast Asian markets. Sometimes we buy the rights to a title for all of South Asia."

### New Age Magazines

A popular side of India's New Age niche is the magazine market, paralleling the American trend. Titles in top demand include *Life Positive*, *Soul Curry* and *The Eternal Solutions*, which recently celebrated its tenth anniversary. It is published monthly in color with a respectable print run of 65,000. Its many advertisers exemplify the favorable winds propelling this progressive market.

India's New Age journals closely follow their American precursors in content and style, with a look that is sometimes almost identical (see photos on page 63). Most articles celebrate success, harmony and, inexorably, consumerism. But there are two notable differences between the American and Indian magazines. First, overt religious content in Indian articles is far more abundant, mostly Hindu, and unapologetic—rarely toned down, simplified or disguised. Second, women are assumed to be the substantial part of the readership, but not all of it. Many Indian advertisers clearly aim at a

male audience.

Pandit R.K. Sharma, an astrologer, is the main figure behind *The Eternal Solutions*, which he dubs "India's first manual to life" in a magazine format. Sharma writes about dharma, astrology, karma, Hindu Gods, reincarnation and other spiritual subjects, and uses excerpts from the *Gita* and the *Vedas* to address questions sent by readers. Still, he sees it as a New Age magazine. "If we had tried to pass on Hindu knowledge



RAJIV MALIK



RAJIV MALIK

**A continental strategy:** (top) Abhishek Jain says all of South Asia can be a market for Motilal Banarsidass' New Age books line; (bottom) Priyanka Malhotra is the main force behind *Full Circle* books and bookstores

more overtly, people may not have accepted it easily. So we described our magazine as a 'manual to life.' We must use the New Age material for bridging the gap between the old and new generations, because what happens is that it actually passes on the message of Sanatana Dharma."

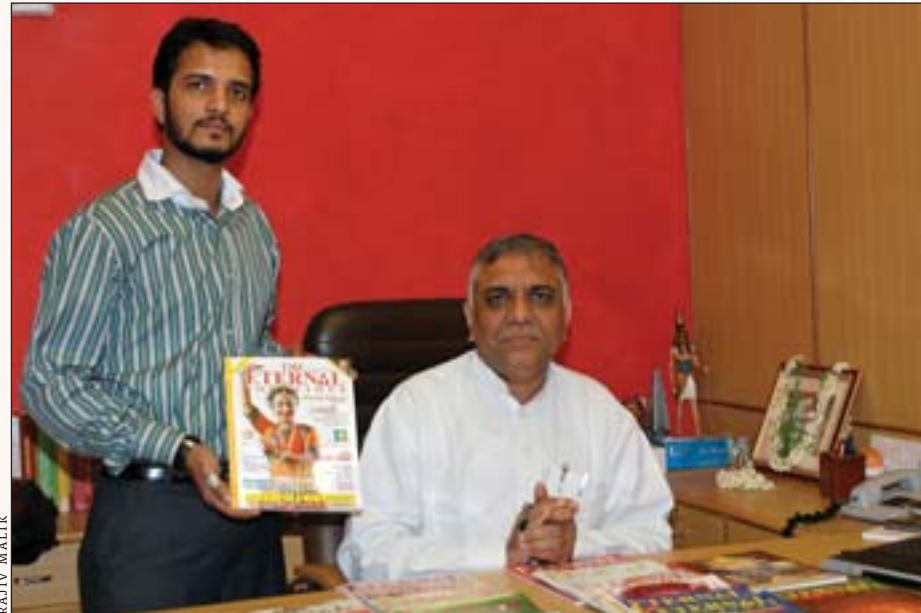
"The whole idea behind *The Eternal Solutions*," Sharma explains, "is to improve the intentions of people. Negativity is being promoted by so many in the media. When I had started the magazine, many friends in the media were skeptical of its commercial viability. But I was inspired from within. I proceeded, thinking that even if it brought no profit, it would still be my way of serving people. Today we are a commercial success while still keeping to the original intentions."

*The Eternal Solutions* bears resemblance to its American counterparts. Sprinkled among the feature articles are tidbits of news and advice that reflect a secular side of the magazine. Advertisements for housing developments, fashionable clothing and spa retreats target an upscale readership. Sharma confirms, "We are read by intellectuals, businessmen, politicians and industrialists. A sizable number of our readers are judges."

"Though New Age publications are using a lot of ideas from Hinduism," Sharma points out, "they do not give due credit to it. In our case, what I write is based on what the spiritual masters and scriptures of my tradition have said. The rishis created it all. That has been the foundation of my learning; how could I deny that?"

Another magazine in this genre, *Life Positive*, takes a holistic approach to news that encompasses





**In vogue:** Pandit R.K. Sharma and his son, Umesh Sharma, editors of The Eternal Solutions

mind, body and spirit. Touting itself as an early example of “spiritual journalism,” the magazine often focuses on the life-affirming initiatives of high-minded individuals. The

theme of spirituality runs throughout the articles, as contributors work to weave spirit into all facets of daily life, from home decor to fashion, from food to work. Advertise-

ments take an interesting departure from its Indian New Age peers. They are, by far, the most mystically oriented, featuring New Age remedies to ailments, New Age solutions to personal problems, workshops and consultations for those seeking divine energies, retreats to achieve Self-realization, and herbs and naturopathic supplements to restore health.

*Soul Curry* is a newcomer to the market. Well written and intellectually dense, it is published by devotees of Haryana-based Anandmurti Gurumaa, whom *Wikipedia* calls “a New Age spiritual guide.” She is known for her universalistic discourses and for translating the Sufi poems of Rumi into the Hindi language.

With regular sections on spirituality, meditation and Zen, *Soul Curry* presents itself as a voice for those who wish to be “free from the clutches of religion, dogmas and societal conditioning.” Nevertheless, the articles are permeated by spirituality and reference to religions and religious figures. *Soul Curry* publishes mystical texts from many traditions, focusing primarily on the philosophy of Advaita and connecting with one’s inner divinity.

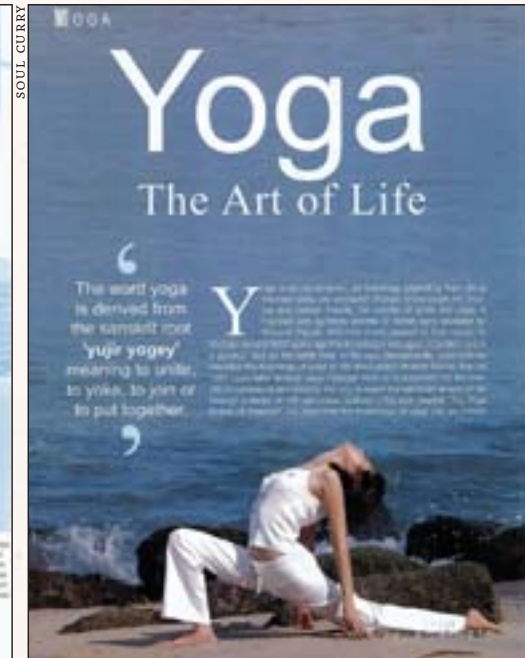
*Soul Curry* is more oriented to women



than its counterparts, repeatedly encouraging women, for example, to “empower” and “divinize” their lives. Though its editorial line closely follows the philosophy of Gurumaa, the magazine has an appeal beyond her devotees. Its advertisements, always a good indication of who is thought to be reading a magazine, are upscale and include engineering firms, high-end real estate projects, health products and pharmaceutical firms.

Where does all this leave us? In “The Hostile New Age Takeover of Yoga,” back in America (an article in the online journal *Slate*, March 2007), Ron Rosenbaum laments the “commodification” and “dumbing down” of yoga and the Eastern philosophy that gives meaning to the practice. One of his readers agreed wholeheartedly, writing that she stopped subscrib-

**Twins:** U.S. and Indian New Age magazines can be strikingly similar. (right) a yoga article from America’s *Yoga Journal*; (far right) a page from India’s *Soul Curry*.



made the same complaints about the New Age in India—and that’s a good thing. 🍵

INDIA INTERVIEWS BY RAJIV MALIK;  
NEW AGE MAGAZINE ANALYSIS BY COLLEEN MORRISON

## The New Age: 121 Years Young

HELENA BLAVATSKY, THE FOUNDER OF Theosophy, made first use of the term “New Age” in her 1888 book *The Secret Doctrine*, in reference to an upcoming era when the world would become a place of understanding and cooperation, free from wars, diseases and greed.

Her book introduced to a European audience key Hindu concepts, such as dharma and the cyclical nature of time. Teeming with Sanskrit terms like *manvantara* and *pralaya*, her work paved the way for other occultist societies to re-examine the mystical teachings of Western schools under the light, of Eastern mysticism. For the first time, teaching on the chakras, reincarnation and dharma were presented alongside the esoteric mysticism of the Abrahamic faiths.

Ms. Blavatsky founded a group dedicated to the exploration of these ideas, the Theosophical Society. On its seal (*inset*), Theosophy sported an aum and a swastika, along with the star of David, an Egyptian ankh cross and the alchemical ouroboros, a snake swallowing its tail.

The investigation of occult aspects of the world’s religions instigated by Ms. Blavatsky was not a marginal subject in its day. It interested the educated bright-

minded gentlemen, scholars, thinkers, poets and scientists. Theosophy influenced the likes of Aldous Huxley, Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Franz Kafka, William Butler Yeats and T. S. Eliot. Sherlock Holmes, fictional hero of the acclaimed series of detective books by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, met an untimely death when his author decided to end the series by killing his hero so Doyle could dedicate himself fully to studying reincarnation, elementals and Spiritualism.

By the early 20th century, two other movements—Spiritualism and New Thought—had emerged as popular disseminators of New Age concepts. Both were replete with distinctly Hindu ideas that were heretical to mainstream Christianity.

Spiritualism, founded by the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg in the 1700s, introduced the daring theory that the dead do not lay asleep awaiting Judgement Day, but roam the subtle planes in ethereal bodies—a view that coincides perfectly with the Hindu view. Much of Spiritualism’s appeal came from the thrilling possibility of contacting deceased loved ones through trained mediums, a practice that is also recognized in the East. In addi-



tion to popularizing séances and mediumship, Spiritualism introduced multitudes to the concept of reincarnation. Séances revealed that many of the dearly departed were waiting not for a train to heaven, but a ticket back to Earth.

New Thought, the third branch of the early New Age movement, was founded in late 19th-century America by a group of spiritual thinkers. It maintains that God is ubiquitous, that spirit is the totality of real things, and the true human self is divine. It focuses on the correct use of the power of thoughts, visualizations and vibrations.

The New Age movement, per se, came into prominence in the 1960s, manifesting as a counterculture that swept across the West, especially among college-age youth, who brazenly opposed the Vietnam War and questioned the ways of society. Many turn to Eastern teachings, occultism

and drugs. Folk musicians, like Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Cat Stevens and Joni Mitchell, brought New Age thought to the mainstream through compelling, impassioned, often revolutionary songs.

In 1967, singers in the musical drama called *Hair* stamped the phrase “*This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius!*” into the minds of Americans. That era of Earth’s evolution, will, according to Theosophist Alice Bailey, officially begin when the Sun is in Aquarius on March 21, the vernal equinox. The song continued, “*Harmony and understanding/Sympathy and trust abounding/...Mystic crystal revelation/And the mind’s true liberation/Aquarius!*” The “Age of Aquarius” became a synonym for the New Age, described as a period in which organized religions would disappear and humankind would abide in universal brotherhood.

Adopting the catch-phrase, the *New Age Journal* was launched in 1974. It became a central source of wisdom for a wider New Age following. As “liberated” youth of the early 1970s embraced the movement, they also shaped and changed it. Building on the foundation of chakras, reincarnation, yoga and esoteric Christian teachings, they encompassed healing crystals, benign extraterrestrials, Mayan prophecies, ecology, parapsychology, mentalism, Zen, trance, self-healing, channeling, past-life regression, sexual tantras, psychedelic drugs and

myriad techniques to raise individual and collective consciousness.

In December, 1987, the New Age made the cover of *Time* magazine with a photo of actress Shirley MacLaine, holding a cluster of crystals. The headline read, “The New Age, Starring Shirley MacLaine, faith healers, channelers, space travelers and crystals galore.” In the same year, an event called the “Harmonic Convergence” engaged extensive media coverage as followers gathered across the globe, from Stonehenge to the Golden Gate Bridge, from Buenos Aires to Copenhagen, to celebrate a cosmic occurrence that marks the start of a new era of peace and spirituality, as foretold in the Mayan calendar.

New Age ideas had entered the mainstream. Tending to the proper spinning of one’s chakras was suddenly a concern of millions of American women. Meditation, “Higher Self,” energies and vibrations became common parlance. New publications spoke to this public interest, including *Psychic Guide Magazine* (later renamed *Body, Mind & Spirit*), *Yoga Journal* and *New Age Voice*.



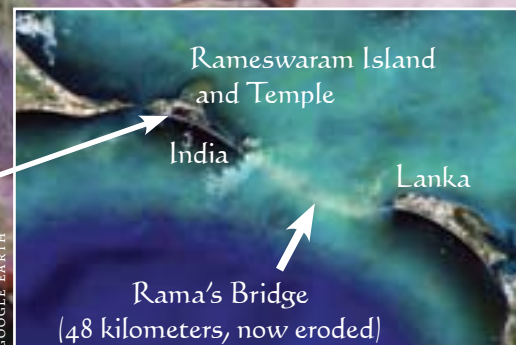
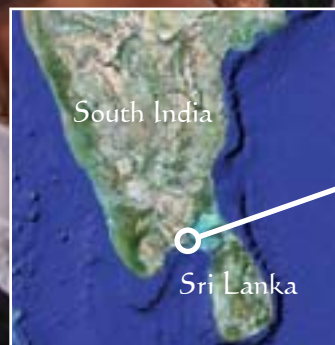
Many authors found fame and fortune with New Age books. Louise Hay’s title on self-healing, colors and energy, *You Can Heal Your Life*, sold 35 million copies; James Redfield’s *The Celestine Prophecy*,

revealing Mayan secrets, sold 23 million. Bestselling authors, like Eckhart Tolle and Deepak Chopra, skillfully repackaged Hindu and Eastern religious concepts for their Western audiences.

As the appetite for books and magazines grew, so did the market for related products and a healthy, spiritual lifestyle. Over the years, most publications adapted their tone and content to please advertisers and reach wider audiences. The pioneering *New Age Journal*,

for example, changed its name to *Body + Soul* after it was bought by America’s most influential homemaking consultant, Martha Stewart. Today it is aimed almost completely at a female audience, espousing a secular approach to spirituality and filtering out any reference to religion. This is typical of most Western publications of this genre, in which the “New Age” has become a mere shadow of its former, deeply spiritual self.





PILGRIMAGE

# Washed in the Waters Of Rameswaram

The 22 wells of this famed South Indian temple relieve pilgrims' karmas and bestow blessings

*In February of 2008, nearly 100 pilgrims led by HINDUISM TODAY publisher Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami trekked to Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu to worship Siva. As is the tradition there, they also sought blessings and made atonement for transgressions at the temple's sacred wells. This article follows the experience of a few of these pilgrims and recounts the temple's history and the significance of the wells.*

**Y**OU HAVE BRAVED THE TWELVE-HOUR bus-and-train ride from Tiruvannamalai, the protracted hotel check-in, the struggle to find wholesome food and check your e-mail, and now, weary but jubilant, you are waist-deep in the Bay of Bengal's salty surf. Surrounded by fellow pilgrims, you bend three times beneath the ocean waves, then face the Sun to honor Surya, whose presence in the sky, so far away, allows life on our planet to exist. You are ready, at last, to experience the wells of Rameswaram.

The Ramanathaswamy Ramalingeswarar Temple, or Rameswaram temple as it is commonly known, is one of India's most revered pilgrimage destinations, on a par with Varanasi in the North. In fact, it is said that a pilgrimage to Varanasi will not bear fruit if one does not also take the long journey to Rameswaram. It is one of 12 Jyotirlinga Siva temples. For Vaishnavas it is one of the four primary sacred places, called *char dhams*, along with Badrinath in the North, Puri in the East and Dwaraka in the West. It is equally revered by Vaishnavites and Saivites because here Lord Rama established the Deity—Rameswara, i.e., "Rama's Lord," or Siva. Sita made the Sivalingam of sand, and together Rama and Sita commenced the worship in the presence of Lakshmana and Hanuman. The island of Rameswaram marks

**Liquid grace:** Pilgrims seeking atonement and blessings crowd around one of the wells to get drenched by the "bucketeer" in this uniquely Hindu ritual

the India side of Ramsetu, the bridge that Lord Rama, as recounted in the *Ramayana*, built to cross over to Sri Lanka to rescue Sita from Ravana.

At some point a small temple, managed by a sadhu, was built around the powerful Sivalingam. In the 12th century, Parakrama Bahu, the Hindu king of Sri Lanka, built the existing central stone sanctum. Thereafter occurred many rounds of expansion and renovation which continue to this day. The labyrinthian complex is large even by Indian temple standards, with thousands of feet of high, granite pillared corridors. Mahasivaratri is the premier festival here, conducted over ten days.

Now, wading out of the sea, you walk some 700 feet to the temple tower and enter a fantasy world of stone chambers and steel handrails, which you soon learn are essential guides to the journey inside. At the first well, you stand as groups are organized into little tribes that will spend the next 90 minutes together. As instructed by your guru, you hold in your mind the far-too-many wrongdoings of this life, sometimes called sins, but that's a charged word that seems too Abrahamic. The caravansary of your misdeeds marches past—the wrongs, the hurts, the transgressions, the vices and victims of your ignorance—all there, carried all this distance. At each well one among them will surge forward, be acknowledged and—as the sacred waters of Sivaness pour over you—washed away, cleansed and released forever. How it must feel, you wonder, to be free of all that.

The soon-to-be-purified pilgrims are ready, and you are urgently called to follow a thin man who scurries ahead holding a tin bucket tied to a long, yellow rope. Only here, you reflect, at Rameswaram, can one gain Siva's fluid clemency. The guide rushes through several dark halls and you and your tribe of 15 try to keep up, confused by the hundreds of other pilgrims following dozens of other bucketeers, all criss-crossing, scurrying barefoot along the wet stone floors, worn smooth by millions of previous pil-

THOMAS KELLY





grims' feet. Suddenly the bucketeer stops at the second well and climbs atop the well wall with such deftness that you forget how precarious his perch really is. He tosses the bucket into the water, some 20 feet below, and with lightning moves born of years of practice, brings the brimming pail up, splashing the cool water unerringly on the crown of your head. Others step forward for their turn, and you take that moment to purposefully watch one ancient misdeed disappear.

Off the tribe goes, through a dim tunnel, out into an open, sunny courtyard, then back into the dark corridors, left and right until the third well is reached. It seemed miles, but it could not have been. You realize you've become disoriented in both time and space. That might be a cause for concern, but not here, not now. It is a blissful state, a touch of superconsciousness, the feeling of being everywhere and everywhen at once. Pilgrim Jeffrey Thomas of Oregon described the feeling, "We moved in smaller groups through the labyrinth, not really sure what direction we were going, following and going forward and letting go, releasing, especially when the water fell, because there were different temperatures at different places within the temple."

**Well locations:** The 22 wells are scattered throughout the temple's labyrinth of corridors and open spaces. The sequence of bathing is in no logical order.



**It begins:** Two couples from Bengaluru take the traditional three dips in the sea to begin the rites

The wells continue in no logical order, some close, others far. Some round and others square. One turns out to be the giant temple tank, 100 feet square and filled with water lilies. You feel the lightness of the soul as misdemeanors and felonies fall away. The magical power of purification floods forth. Your mind wanders to the story told yesterday about the founding of the temple, how absolution was precisely Rama's purpose in establishing the shrine. While he was within his duty as a king to fight and kill Ravana, the villain who kidnapped his wife, Ravana was a brahmin, and the *Dharma Shastras* proscribe killing a brahmin. As penance for his offense, Rama worshiped Siva with intense devotion, right here. Even the great ones need grace it seems.

This morning, a swami explained that penance, *prayaschitta* in Sanskrit, is an act of atonement through an expression of devotion toward the Deity—such as pilgrimage or austerity. The Hindu pilgrim who bathes at Rameswaram does so with the intention of seeking God's grace to permanently alter his karma. As anthropologist Steven Huyler explains, "Relationships with the Divine in India are believed to be reciprocal. Health and good fortune are the natural products of a symbiotic relationship with the Gods. Misfortune and calamity are the result of imbalance, of inappropriate behavior and misguided thoughts and actions. Occasionally a devotee might be required to conduct intense rituals to demonstrate devotion and to reestablish the karmic equilibrium. In this



GOOGLE EARTH



**Watery blessing:** Sheela Rahavendran waits behind her daughter Aarti who is being drenched at the Kavatcha Tirtham

process, miracles are viewed as common occurrences, blessings bestowed by the Gods upon faithful devotees."

Knowledgeable pilgrims bring to Rameswaram their personal list of sins to absolve and blessings to seek. Niraj Thaker (age 31) of England recounted his experience, "Just before the well bathing, memories came up of times I've been angry and even violent in my thoughts. I asked the water elements to cleanse me of that and help me heal. When I reached the last well, a strong message came to my mind: 'There is no misdeed that cannot be erased. There is no misdeed that cannot be worked on.' It felt like I was repairing things in my life."

You are at well number 17 and feel strangely different, right with yourself and the world. The loud echoing of hundreds of devotees racing through the stone halls seems miles away. Sweet waves of love and oneness are welling up, and you observe that the experience has abruptly transformed from a rushing out of the blemished to the rushing in of beatitude. Only later will you learn that's exactly what is happening. Most of the early wells purify and those at the end offer boons and special graces. It makes sense; we must be empty of the burdens of the past to allow the Divine to enter and fill us. Is this what it feels like to be pure, to perfectly forgive yourself for all you have ever done? Such divine feelings have never been felt before, not even in meditation. "How long can this last?" you wonder.

Each well has a story, you are told. The first, Mahalakshmi Tirtham, was blessed by Goddess Lakshmi and bestows riches. The

## "By the end of it, I felt newly born"

Lucy Souter, shown in the photo below at Kodi Tirtham, the final well, relates her experience: "I was very nervous initially about the practical details of how I would manage being all wet, if it would be uncomfortable, etc."

"Once the experience started, I found it so moving that I completely forgot about all those things. I was instead thinking about sins as being things that separate me from God and ways in which I identify with my mistakes and frailties and weaknesses rather than with my soul and my connection to God."

"At each well that went by, I found myself focusing on one thing that I wanted to let go of. Then I'd get doused with this bucket of water in such a startling way that for a minute whatever I was thinking completely dropped out of my head."

As the bathing process went on, I just felt lighter and lighter and more and more joyful until, by maybe number seventeen, I just started singing, and I couldn't stop.

"I was very, very happy. It was definitely a spiritual experience, a peeling away of layers of worldly and superficial things that kept me away from God. By the end, I felt newly born. It was an amazing feeling."

"Over the twenty-four hours that followed, I'd find things creeping back that I thought I'd put down. But being able to remember what it felt like to have put them down, to have wanted to put them down and to have put them down, made me rise above them again."

"I recommend it to anyone open to the power of ritual to change them spiritually. It was the most powerful tool I've ever experienced."







THOMAS KELLY

second, third and fourth, Gayatri, Savitri and Saraswati Tirthams, lifted a curse from a rishi. At the eleventh, Sage Vatsanaba was rid of the sin of ingratitude. At Ganga Tirtham, the 13th well, Rama was absolved of the sin of killing Ravana. At the 16th, called Ganasuruthi, a king attained enlightenment. You reach the final well, the twenty-second. Called Kodi Tirtham, it is said to confer blessings equal to bathing in the holy Ganges ten million times. There is no bucket here,

**Well done:** Ayyappan pilgrims shiver at the Chandra and Surya wells. Some wells are isolated, others are in pairs or clusters.

just a tiny copper cup holding a few scant ounces. How ironic. The greatest blessings from the smallest demitasse!

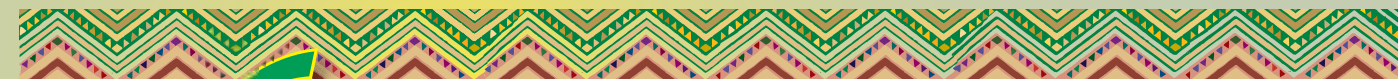
Lindsey Boyer of New York had on previous visits to Rameswaram chosen to take only sprinkles of water. This time she underwent the full bathing and found it was completely different: "The whole experience of well bathing in these purifying waters brought me an overwhelming joy. Once I was wet, I was freed from all mundane concerns. And by the time we moved from the sin-removing wells to the blessing ones, I was out of sins to think about. Much tension in my body has been washed away. I was free

**Holy bath:** Wells are round and square, small and large. The largest is the temple's tank, filled with pink water lilies.

to just be with God rather than attaching myself to external things."

Kartikeya Katir (age 18) of California, described his experience: "Every time I walked up to a well, all of these emotions and all of these memories would come up. I could physically feel them getting caught up near my throat. But as soon as that water hit me, the memories completely evaporated into nothing, and I couldn't even remember what I was upset about."

Soaking wet, you leave the hallowed home of Lord Siva reluctantly and ramble back to the hotel in silence, not wanting to say a word lest you break the spell. How privileged we are, you remind yourself, to be here at Rameswaram, the only place on the planet where this particular spiritual encounter is possible. You have done it, endured a hundred hardships and fulfilled the pilgrim's quest for purification, and felt Siva's magic touch your soul. Would that all the world could feel each day as you do this moment. You know there will be other not-so-divine experiences in life, and probably other mistakes as well. But they, too, can be conquered. But, for now, they seem infinitely far away.



# SACRED GIFTS

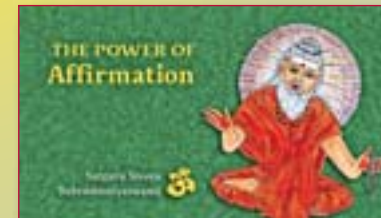
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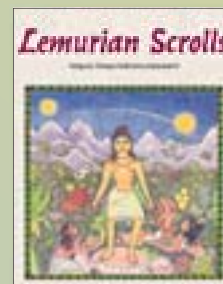
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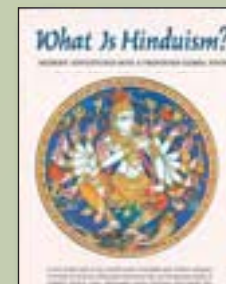
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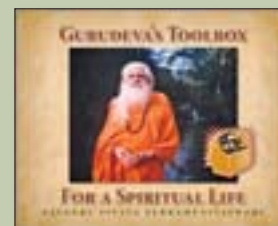
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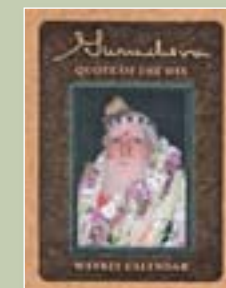
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# Hindu Heritage Endowment

## GANGA SIVANATHAN AND INNERSEARCHERS START RAMANATHASWAMY TEMPLE CLEANING FUND

Ganga Sivanathan of Adelaide, Australia, was awed by the Ramanathaswamy Temple (the same temple in our sacred wells article, page 64) as she walked its rhythmic, ornate, pillared corridors for the first time with the Innersearchers of the 2008 Asian Odyssey Innersearch pilgrimage. But the Innersearchers also saw that the huge temple, whose foundations were laid in the 12th century and whose corridors are said to be the longest of their kind in the world, urgently needed a cleaning fund.

A major pilgrim and tourist magnet, the Ramanathaswamy Temple, located on the island of Rameswaram just off the eastern shores of Tamil Nadu, has all the maintenance needs of lesser known temples, multiplied by age, size and its proximity to the sea, 700 feet away. Ms. Sivanathan stayed in Rameswaram for several days in February as part of the Innersearch travel-study program led by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, head of Kauai’s Hindu Monastery in Hawaii.



Co-creators of temple cleaning fund Ganga Sivanathan (second from right) and Devi Marks (in blue)

“It’s an extraordinary town and extraordinary temple,” she said, recalling the town’s coming alive at 4:00 each morning to the high-volume music of the traditional instruments of the Periya Melam (temple band). “The town has a wonderful spiritual feeling about it,” she added. “Everybody there seems to have an association with the temple.” But the wear and tear on the temple, which offers a minimum of six ceremonies daily and has twenty-two wells for ritual cleansing, is unmistakable.

Seeing signs of neglect in so holy a precinct, the Innersearch pilgrims met to establish and provide the first contributions to the Ramanathaswamy Temple Cleaning Fund (#73) at Hindu Heritage Endowment. They hope to build the principal to \$50,000, using the interest “to keep the temple clean and tidy” in environmentally friendly ways. Ganga and fellow Innersearcher Devi Marks undertook to establish the fund on behalf of the Innersearchers. The pilgrims see contributions to the Fund as a way to have a direct connection with one of the twelve most powerful Siva temples (jyotirlinga) in India. They believe that the Fund will appeal strongly to Hindus everywhere. “You can visit and know you are a direct part of that great temple,” Ganga enthused. “It’s an amazing feeling.”

Ms. Sivanathan’s interest in Indian spirituality and Hinduism began during the mid-90s during a business trip to India for a global software development company. She later used her senior management experience to establish and head Indra Process and Performance Consulting, a management consulting firm. She incorporates many of the teachings of Gurudeva, late founder of the Kauai Monastery, into her consulting practice which helps businesses identify and work with “organizational paradoxes,” competing goals commonly found in all types of for-profit and nonprofit enterprises. Accommodating worshipers while keeping a temple tidy, for example.

To contribute to the Ramanathaswamy Temple Cleaning Fund or to establish a Fund of your own to support Hindu causes, contact Shanmuganathaswami at 808-822-3012, extension 244 or [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org), or visit the fund’s website. To donate to this fund, visit [www.hheonline.org](http://www.hheonline.org).



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## OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

### Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment

Subhash Kumar Choudhary	US\$150.00
Shikha Deveshwar	20.00
Sharad & Namrata Haldwania	101.00
Trond Liland	30.00
Ripla & Gaurav Malhotra	51.00
Philip J. Murphy	200.00
K. Lakshmi Kantha Reddy	393.00
Pathmini Saravanapavan	25.00
Darma & Shivali Satgunasingam	75.00
Niraj Thaker	76.50
Other Donations	44,635.51
Total	45,834.62

### Iraivan Temple Endowment

Anonymous	2,653.00
Roger & Rosemary Brown	120.00
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	200.00
Nancy Craig	27.00
P.S. Bob & Bharati Gaitonde	101.00
Latha Kannan	153.00
Trond Liland	81.00
Surendra & Patsy Rajpal	250.50
Niraj Thaker	76.50
Chandrasekhar Venkatakrishnan	100.20
Other Donations	53,478.82
Total	57,318.55

### Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund

Anonymous	750.00
Gunavadee Caremben	4.86
Somasundaram Caremben	4.86
Sukanta Caremben	4.86
Sharath Chigurupati	369.00
Janava Dharmadeva	532.00
Amooda Koothan	28.25
Saravan Koothan	3.19
Saroja Devi Manickam	7.60
Mrunal Patel	501.00
Kirtideva Peruman	9.52
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Devaladevi Sivaceyon	5.52
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Patudeva Sivaceyon	5.52
Hemavalli Sivalingam	1.67
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Potriyan Sivanathan	8.24
Javanya Skanda	11.20
Total	2,371.23

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Amooda Sagum	32.37
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Siven Veerasamy	26.95
Total	2,960.27

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Paramaseeven Canagasaby	20.58
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Total	71.46

### Hindu of the Year Fund

Vel Alahan	51.00
Raj & Deepa Maturi	1,500.00
Total	1,628.53

### Boys School for Iraivan Priesthood

Bala Sivaceyon	11.04
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### Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund

William & Barbara Bachmann	100.00
Shyamadeva Dandapani	63.00
Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	14.00
Anonymous	51.00
Gowri Nadason	150.37
Vayudeva Varadan	54.00
Chandrasekhar Venkatakrishnan	100.20
Other Donations	4,800.00
Total	5,410.38

### Nadesan Family Lord Muruga Shum Fund

Sadhunathan Nadesan	15.00
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### Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam

Thambyrajah Subramaniam	30.00
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### Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment

Devan & Suchita Padmanabhan	1,001.00
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### Malaysian Hindu Youth Education Trust

Subhash Kumar Choudhary	100.00
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### Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment

Manoharan Navaratnarajah	75.00
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### Malaysia Hindu Renaissance Fund

Devdatta Mhaiskar	21.00
Natraj Narayanswami	21.00
Total	119.53

### Hinduism Today Production Fund

Subhash Kumar Choudhary	150.00
Hiranya Gowda	93.00
Bhagawandas P. Lathi	201.00
Raj & Deepa Maturi	1,500.00
Murli Melwani	2,000.00
Devdatta Mhaiskar	51.00
Sudhindra Rajavasireddy	500.00
Kumar Ranganathan	450.00
Karuppuswamy Senthil Nathan	33.50
Total	5,056.03

### Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund

Balogopalan Nair	250.00
Natraj Narayanswami	42.00
Kumar Ranganathan	100.00
Alex Ruberto	100.00
Rodney & Ilene Stenden	30.00
Chandrasekhar Venkatakrishnan	100.20
Total	699.73

### Hindu Education Endowment

Nancy Craig	27.00
Hasu N. & Hansa H. Patel	100.00
Total	204.53

### Hindu Press International Endowment Fund

Hiranya Gowda	63.00
James Stapleton	54.00
Total	194.53

### Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund

Manoharan Navaratnarajah	75.00
Gassa Patten	900.00
Total	1,052.53

### Saiva Agamas Trust

Ganga Sivanathan	426.00
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### Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund

Shyamadeva Dandapani	63.00
Karuppuswamy Senthil Nathan	33.50
Total	174.03

### Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund

Shankar Mallampalli	1,006.00
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### Hindu Heritage Endowment

#### Administrative Fund

Krishnan Chawla	500.00
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#### Kauai Aadheenam Religious

#### Art and Artifacts Fund

Rajadeva Alahan	153.00
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### Thank You Bodhinatha Fund

Anonymous	3,368.00
Hotranatha Ajaya	44.00
Vel Alahan	108.00
Marlene Carter	101.00
Judith Cornell	108.00
Shyamadeva Dandapani	202.00
Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	324.00
Sakuntalai Krishnan	2,577.22
Ripla & Gaurav Malhotra	31.00
Manogaran Mardemootoo	100.00
Toshadevi Nataraja	45.00
Manoharan Navaratnarajah	150.00
Govind B. Patel	1,000.00
Mrunal Patel	5,000.00
Shanta Devi Periasamy	412.08
Jayshree S. Rao	5,000.00
Alex Ruberto	60.00
Aran Sambandar	108.00
Nanthakumar Satgunasingam	101.00
Rakesh Sood	250.00
Udayakumar Thoota	10.00
Thanaleetmi Umamaheswaran	150.00
Vayudeva Varadan	63.00
Other Donations	5,176.38
Total	24,566.20

### Udayan Care Endowment Fund

Balogopalan Nair	250.00
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### Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund

Alex Ruberto	60.00
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### Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment

Subhash Kumar Choudhary	100.00
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### Manitha Neyam Trust Fund

Bala Sivaceyon	22.07
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### Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage

Arun Narayanan	200.00
Yogesh Patel	200.00
Ramesh Ramani	20.00
Chiranjivi Raparla	15.00
Total	512.52

### Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund

Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00
Yogesh Patel	200.00
Total	327.52

### Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund

Balogopalan Nair	250.00
Yogesh Patel	200.00
Total	527.52

### Karnataka Temple Development Fund

Hiranya Gowda	303.00
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### Hinduism Today Complimentary

#### Subscription Fund

Hiranya Gowda	153.00
Arun Narayanan	100.00
Total	330.52

### Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund

Shyamadeva Dandapani	63.00
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### Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund

Nancy Craig	54.00
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### Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home Fund

Anonymous	45.00
Jeri Arin	200.00
Marlene Carter	54.00
Sunil Chacko	368.38
Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	14.00
Yogesh Patel	200.00
Kumar Ranganathan	100.00
Ganga Sivanathan	300.00
Soma Sundaram	40.00
Kuhanesapathy Thavaras Pathy	25.00
Manonmany Vaithialingam	10.00
Silas H. Zirkle	450.00
Total	1,883.90

### Sri Arjunan & Srimalathi

#### Dhalama Monastic Fund

David & Shelah Young	650.00
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### Yogaswami Hindu Boys' Home Fund

Siva & Dharshi Balasingham	50.00
Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	14.00
Nirmala Devi	10.00
Dharmalingam Siddhan	125.00
Kuhanesapathy Thavaras Pathy	25.00
Total	301.52

### Kodiswara Satguru Malaysia Travel Fund

Rani Jothiswarar Estate	85.04
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### Maha Ganapati Temple of

#### Arizona Endowment

Radha & Ganesh Krishnan	108.00
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### India Hindu Tribals Endowment

Devdatta Mhaiskar	21.00
Balogopalan Nair	250.00
Natraj Narayanswami	21.00
Niraj Thaker	10.00
Chandrasekhar Venkatakrishnan	100.20
Total	479.72

### Murugan Temple of N. America Puja Fund

Chitrnanjan Saravanapavan	25.00
Niranjan Saravanapavan	1,000.00
Vayudeva Varadan	54.00
Total	1,156.52

### Saivite Tamil Foundation Endowment

Suresh Jambunathan	75.00
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### Rani Jothiswarar Memorial Fund

Kodisvara Jothiswarar	29.52
Rani Jothiswarar Estate	200.00
Siva Jothiswary	29.52
Total	336.56

### Ramanathaswamy Temple Cleaning Fund

Anonymous	700.00
Hiranya Gowda	101.00
June Kitto	100.00
Manogaran Mardemootoo	64.75
Arun Narayanan	100.00
Niraj Thaker	22.00
Jeffrey Leland Joseph Thomas	108.00
Total	1,273.27

### Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples Fund

Yogesh Patel	200.00
Chandrasekhar Venkatakrishnan	100.20
Total	377.72

### Insurance Donations

Mrunal Patel	4,004.00
Shun K. Sunder	5,000.00
Total	9,004.00

### Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment

Other Donations	600.00
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### All Multi-Donor Funds (Split)

K.D. & A.D. Williams	5,582.02
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### Total Contributions

	\$173,504.18
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### Funds at Market Value, Dec 31, 2008

Total Endowment Funds	\$6,333,287.68
Total Pooled Income Funds	\$176,626.69

### Grand Total

	\$6,509,914.37
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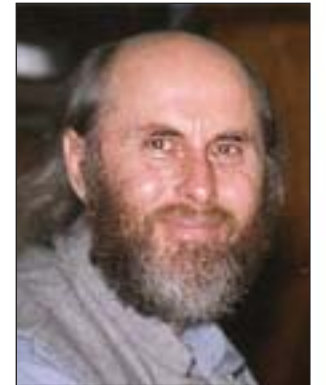
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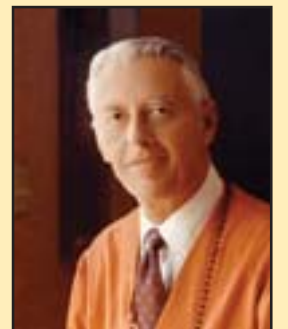
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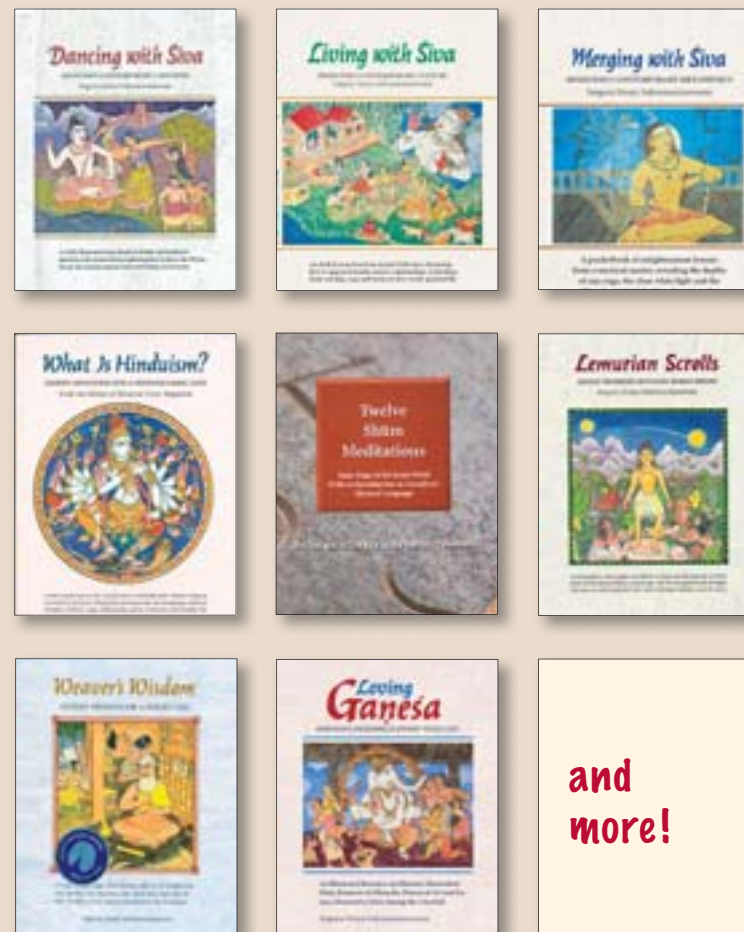
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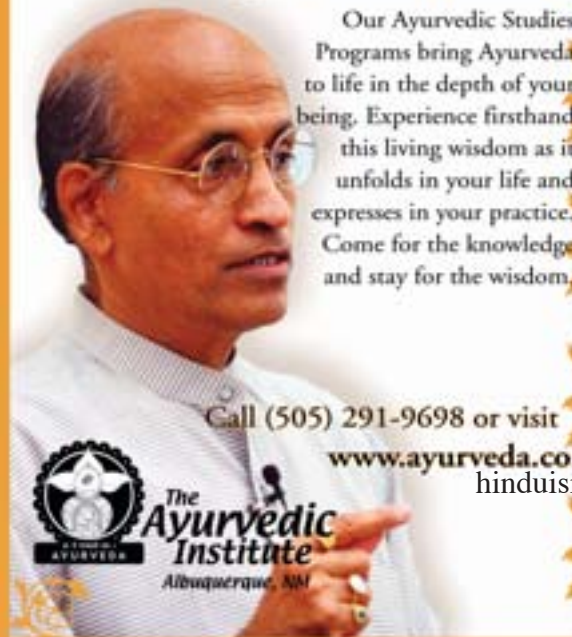


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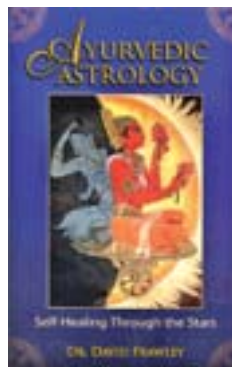
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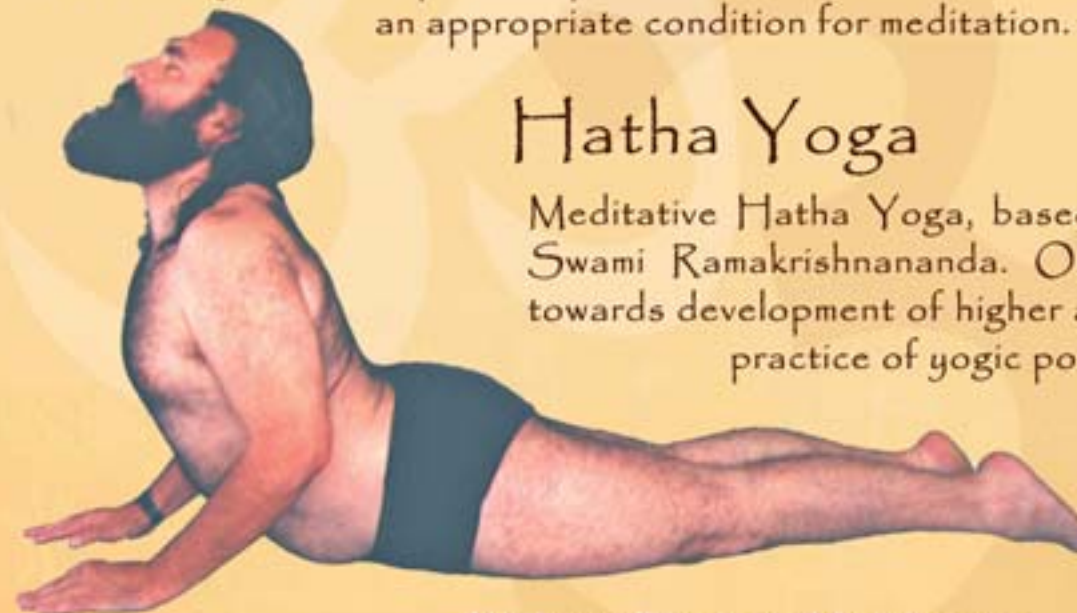
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LANGUAGE

## Web Translation Takes Down Walls, But Has a Long Way to Go



Following in the footsteps of the pioneer Babel Fish, now run by Yahoo, Google Translate will also render text and web pages. There are major differences between the two.

FOR TREKKIES WHO LOVED THE UNIVERSAL translator, for those who have seen United Nations translators translating live while in session, and for countless publishers who have spent years struggling to get their works into other languages, the Web's translation services are wondrous.

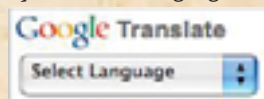
On the other hand, there are serious caveats for users. Web translation is far from universal or accurate. Babel Fish, using the long standing Systran software (founded in 1968) offers better translations but works in only a dozen languages. Google is developing its own translation software, which now offers 34 languages that cover well over half of the world's population. There are major gaps.

There is only one Indic option: Hindi. Urdu, Bengali, Tamil, Gujarati, Marathi and other important Indian languages are not yet supported. Then there are the ongoing font headaches. You will only see non-Roman scripts if you have a matching Unicode font installed on your computer.

But given the enormity of the task, what Google is attempting is a marvel that holds great promise for the future. Accuracy is an issue. Try it yourself and compare: Enter [www.hinduismtoday.com](http://www.hinduismtoday.com) into the translators at [babelfish.yahoo.com](http://babelfish.yahoo.com) and [translate.google.com](http://translate.google.com).

Savvy webmasters can add a Google gadget

to their web page to make it easy for users to switch to one of the thirty-four available languages. Once these services take you into your chosen language, all links and further



web pages continue to be translated as you browse. If

your site is in Spanish, for example, users can choose Hindi, and magically, as they continue surfing, the Spanish pages appear in Hindi, even the navigation buttons.

After the original English, we present below Google's translations into the three top languages of the world by population of speakers (figures are from Ethnologue's 1999 reports). We leave it to our polyglot readers who understand Spanish, Hindi or Chinese to decide how well Google Translate has performed with this passage from Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's talk "Hinduism: The Greatest Religion in the World."

### English—Spoken by 322,000,000

I boldly proclaim Hinduism the greatest religion in the world. Hinduism's venerable age has seasoned it to maturity. It is the only religion, to my knowledge, which is not founded in a single historic event or prophet, but which itself precedes recorded history. Hinduism has been called the "cradle of

spirituality" and the "mother of all religions," partially because it has influenced virtually every major religion and partly because it can absorb all other religions, honor and embrace their scriptures, their saints, their philosophy.

### Spanish—Spoken by 332,000,000

I proclamar con valentía el hinduismo la mayor religión en el mundo. Hinduismo la venerable edad ha sazornado a la madurez. Es la única religión, a mi conocimiento, que no está fundada en un solo acontecimiento histórico o profeta, pero que a su vez precede a la historia. El hinduismo ha sido llamada la "cuna de la espiritualidad" y la "madre de todas las religiones," en parte porque ha influido en prácticamente todos los principales religión y, en parte, porque puede absorber todas las otras religiones, el honor y el abrazo de sus escrituras, sus santos, su filosofía.

### Hindi—Spoken by 366,000,000

मैं साहसपूर्वक दुनिया में सबसे बड़ा धर्म को हिंदू धर्म का प्रचार. हिंदू धर्म के सम्मानित उम्र की परिपक्वता के लिए यह अनुभवी है. यही एक धर्म है, जो एक ऐतिहासिक घटना है या नबी, में की स्थापना की, लेकिन नहीं है ही इतिहास है जो दर्ज precedes मेरे ज्ञान, के लिए है. क्योंकि यह लगभग हर प्रमुख धर्म और आंशिक रूप क्योंकि यह अन्य सभी धर्मों को अवशोषित कर सकते हैं, सम्मान और उनके ग्रंथों आलिंगन प्रभावित है हिंदू धर्म, "आंशिक रूप से आध्यात्मिकता के" झूले "और सभी धर्मों के" माँ को बुलाया गया है, उनके पवित्र, उनके दर्शन.

### Chinese—Spoken by 937,132,000

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